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# The problems of resistance of the contemporary Christian radical movement.

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THE PROBLEMS OF RESISTANCE OF THE CONTEMPORARY  
CHRISTIAN RADICAL MOVEMENT

A Dissertation Presented

By

ROBERT CHARLES FREYSINGER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

February 1978

Department of Political Science

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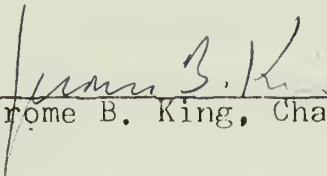
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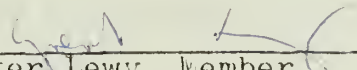
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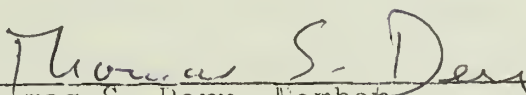
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Robert C. Freysinger

## ABSTRACT

The Problems of Resistance of the Contemporary  
Christian Radical Movement

February, 1978

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Directed by: Professor Jerome B. King

In recent years, an ecumenical Christian radical movement, espousing humanist, participatory views similar to the secular New Left, has emerged to challenge, and develop a base of resistance against, the advanced capitalist nations and their dependencies in the Third World. Critical of prevailing social and political arrangements in these areas, which these Christian advocates describe as "institutional violence" directed against the masses, they have opted for both violent and nonviolent means of revolutionary political action, hoping to implement a Christian-inspired form of socialism. However, they have found themselves restricted by the cultural heritage of their religion, which has placed impediments in the way of resistance to political authority, as well as the use of overt violence in the context of intra-societal political relationships.

In an effort to transcendent the conservative bias of the Christian heritage, Christian radicals have attempted to blend the themes of modern revolutionary theory with the

spirit and intent of the Just War theories of St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, along with the instrumental conception of temporal institutions advanced by St. Augustine, in hopes of forging a contemporary justification for Christian socialist revolution. In addition, they have advanced a theology imbued with the ideas of anti-capitalist thinking appropriate to the conditions of the late twentieth century, a viewpoint they claim to be founded in the biblical revelations of God. This theology projects a new image of God's relation to man-in-history for the purpose of avoiding the anti-political effects of earlier strands of Christian thinking.

Although these contemporary religious rebels have made great strides in bringing classical Christian conceptions of political order back into the mainstream of modern revolutionary theory, they have failed to explore fully the implications of their views. They have failed to develop a working calculus of justifiable revolutionary response appropriate to the variable conditions of freedom and repression in different capitalist societies. Furthermore, they have failed to come to grips with the problem of excessive violence in the context of the politics of modern insurgency. In addition, they have thought very little in terms of the dynamic tensions existing between the needs of the modern socialist economy and the ideal of participatory democracy. Another

problem area is the inherent tension between the ontologies of secular socialism (especially Marxism) and Christianity. This ontological tension could place real practical barriers between the two schools of socialist thought at some later time. Finally, recent events in some of the advanced capitalist nations, and in the Third World, raise serious questions as to the continued viability of radical Christian analyses of modern politics.



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## INTRODUCTION

It is part of the conventional wisdom of Western society that religion, particularly Christianity, is a force which impedes social change. Without realizing it perhaps, most of us have accepted the Enlightenment view, exemplified by Marx's notion of the "opiate of the people," which perceives organized religion, in its philosophical and institutional dimensions, as the bulwark of the status quo. It is for that reason then, that we are taken aback when, occasionally, certain individuals and groups clearly linked to organized religion, challenge existing social and political arrangements. The latest surprise came in the 1960's, when some Christian clerics and lay persons came to believe, with secular New Left radicals, that the political order of mature capitalism, in its domestic and foreign policy areas, had taken on a demonic quality, and therefore had to be resisted and overthrown. This modern Christian radical perspective was based on the conviction that these developed capitalist, and lesser developed Third World, societies were incapable of reforming themselves, that they had to be replaced by an entirely new, egalitarian order of politics and social organization. A new normative system and set of related institutions, based on the radicals' perception of "genuine" Christian teaching and their concurrent acceptance of secular humanistic socialism (and the claimed similarity

between genuine Christianity and humanistic socialism), was to be implemented.

Christians have always engaged in dialogue with the dominant political trends of history, usually entering the dialogue after secular forces have set the essential tone and direction of the trend. Rarely, however, have Christians participated in movements which challenge social order itself, and which implicitly point in the direction of revolutionary action. The Christian tradition, though not unconcerned with questions of temporal justice and the quality of earthly life (questions which we normally subsume under the heading of "politics"), has tended to view with suspicion any approach to human life which believes that man, on his own, can realize true earthly justice and order. Since God is the dominant force in the Christian perspective, any philosophic system which elevates human rationality to the point where it replaces God (and God's relation to man) as the focus of history must be suspect. Furthermore, traditional Christianity has placed great restrictions on the use of violence in human affairs as well as on the moral right to resist established political order.

It is for these reasons then, that Christianity has developed the reputation of being an essentially conservative social and political phenomenon. For Christianity has clashed head-on with the dominant secular notions of modern times. Since the Enlightenment, it has become almost an article of

faith, that human life can be dramatically improved, and justice realized, through the creative power of human rationality linked to action in the political world. No longer must man passively rely on God's will for improvements in his earthly condition. Now man can discover, through his own intellectual efforts, the guidelines of a positive future history, and can realize that future through revolutionary movements which will assault the structure of the world as it is presently constituted. Of course, this implies resistance to political order, and, very often, violence, sometimes on a massive scale. Marxism is simply one variant of this modern theme.

It would seem, then, that a wide gulf separates the contemporary radical Christian movement from the mainstream of the Christian tradition. Not only does this movement advocate resistance to established authority in many of the nations of the developed capitalist West and the Third World, but many of its activists have come to believe that violent revolution is the only possible approach in creating the new order. In addition, and of greater philosophical import, the contemporary Christian rebels have adopted the modern secular idea that man's thought and action in history is capable of fashioning a new order of things, perhaps even capable of creating a new man, long the dream of followers of socialism. At the very least, modern Christian radicals

entertain a far more optimistic view of man's potential for improvement at his quest for earthly justice than did their predecessors.

This dissertation will explore the problems generated by the stance of resistance taken by the members of this radical Christian movement. We will attempt to show how modern Christians have utilized some basic underlying themes from the Christian political philosophic tradition and blended them with some of the basic ideas of the modern age of revolution. Far from being a break with the past, we will attempt to illustrate how fundamental Christian notions concerning the moral use of violence and the nature of social order and political institutions have been synthesized with modern revolutionary political theory, to the point where it must be seriously considered that an entirely new Christian political tradition has been established. History may very well point to the 1960s and early 1970s as the moment when a two thousand year old institution underwent a significant revision of its ideas and embarked on a bold new course in its relationship with surrounding social forces. Without appearing too optimistic, however, we will also study serious questions posed by the contemporary radical Christian position, questions which remain unanswered and which threaten the future viability of the movement.

Before we present the outline of the work, however, it



is necessary to discuss briefly the meaning of political resistance, for resistance is one of those political concepts which have been employed in different ways in the relationship existing between the governors and the governed.

The meaning of resistance. Resistance to the commands of political authority is a situation in which the normal condition of society, where individuals consciously and positively support government or else obey out of a "habit of obedience," becomes altered, and individuals now openly challenge the duly constituted governors. This challenge can be organized or spontaneous, violent or nonviolent, carried out by a few or by a large percentage of the population, led by members of the social elite, or by elements of the lower orders of society. In short, resistance can take many forms.

But to understand political resistance, one must go beyond these observations to explore how resistance differs from a single disagreement with particular policies enacted by the authorities. For resistance, as we will discuss it throughout this work, implies the rejection of the overall structure of authority in a society at a particular time.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David, V. J. Bell. Resistance and Revolution. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973, pp. 1-13. We realize that not all will agree with the definition of resistance presented here, as some would employ the term to include disobedience to a policy perceived to be immoral or unwise. But we have defined resistance in this way precisely to distinguish between those situations where people disapprove of particular aspects of authority and those situations where the overall structure of authority is questioned. Bell himself would not fully agree with our distinctions.



It is the beginning of a rejection of the social order itself, if not already the fully conscious rejection of social arrangements.

We can perceive the stances an individual or group could take towards political authority as a continuum, with the poles being total, conscious, and positive (that is, approving) acceptance of authority, and total, violent rejection of the commands of the government of a repugnant social order.<sup>2</sup> As we move from the pole of total acceptance to the pole of utter rejection, we encounter the habit of obedience, an orientation in which people are essentially passive, obey government, and quietly lead their lives oblivious to the serious political debates taking place in society. They really don't think much about things political at all. It is probable that most people, in most societies, most of the time, fall into this category.

Next we find protest against the policies of government. This would be a situation in which a person or group disagreed with the wisdom or morality of a particular policy enacted by the authorities, or rejected the authority or actions of a particular decision-maker. This protest might take the form of articulation of the disagreement (in hopes of building widespread support for the change of policy or the removal of that person), or it might go beyond this, to

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-7.

include the selective disobedience of, not all law, but only those commands associated with the particular area of public policy in dispute, or against the specific commands of the decision-maker reputed to be acting illegally. This was the position of Martin Luther King, Jr., in regard to racial policy. It would also be the position of those who claimed to be in conflict with an alleged usurper, or one who had stepped outside the bounds of accepted limitations on the exercise of power. But protest (which may take violent forms) is not a rejection of the authority of the decision-making mechanism itself. Political resistance begins on the other side of an imaginary threshold which lies just beyond protest:

"Resistance occurs as the result of a conscious decision not to obey authority. It is more extreme than protest, which aims at the change of a policy but does not reject the authority of the policy maker. In effect, as the protestor explicitly displays his disagreement with a particular policy or person in authority (in the case of an alleged usurper or one who has acted illegally), he tacitly registers his conviction that 'the system' can correct its faults and remedy its abuses."<sup>3</sup>

Thus, even in the case of a person who carries out selective civil disobedience against a particular policy, or who disobeys the commands of a usurper or decision-maker exercising excessive power, the action implies that the overall system of authority is valid. The system is capable of self-correction, in the case of an unwise policy. Or, once the transgressing person

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

is removed, the system will return to the status quo ante, a desirable state of affairs.

Resistance begins when one questions the essential framework of the public policy process itself. There is something about the institutional arrangements that makes bad public policy almost inevitable. The "system" is not capable of self-correction in terms of policy, quite the contrary, because of its nature, the system will probably allow bad public policy to accumulate and spread out over several substantive areas, negatively affecting the lives of people in a multitude of ways. Furthermore, the basis of normative judgement of the system necessarily lies outside the legal-moral foundation of the system itself.<sup>4</sup> Resistance to absolute monarchs in Europe took place not only because of disputes over policies and their effects, but also because of the belief that no one single person (heretofore accepted) should monopolize decision-making power. Justification of resistance stemmed from ideas alien to the ongoing system of institutions and supporting ethics.

Resistance may take nonviolent forms or it may manifest itself in either selective or widespread violence. It may aim at the significant altering of those decision-making

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<sup>4</sup>This could also be the case in a situation of protest, where the reasons for the protest of a particular policy lay in a moral stance not currently reflected in the political and legal processes of society.

mechanisms normally thought of as government, or it may accomplish this while going beyond government, radically restructuring all social relationships.<sup>5</sup> The end result of resistance could be the horrifying consequence of total revolution and internal war. Whatever else resistance is, it is more than just an attempt to change a certain policy, or remove a certain leader or group of leaders who have usurped legitimate authority or temporarily acted outside the bounds of the normally accepted patterns of the exercise of power. Resistance is action aimed at establishing a new order of things, either strictly governmental, or on a broader social scale.

The movement. We will begin our study of the modern Christian radical movement by analyzing the Christian tradition's views towards political obligation and political violence, since contemporary Christians have undoubtedly been affected by institutionalized religion's attitudes on these subjects. Does the Christian heritage provide clues as to the proper relationship between authority and the governed, as well as the justified use of violence in human affairs? If so, does this

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<sup>5</sup>The distinction between resistance and revolution is extremely difficult to formulate. See David Bell, Resistance and Revolution, *ibid.*, pp. 2-10. Bell cites and discusses the ideas of Hannah Arendt. On Revolution. New York: Viking Press, 1963; and Chalmers Johnson. Revolutionary Change. Boston: Little, Brown, 1966. Perhaps the term revolution could be reserved for those situations where broad societal relationships, as well as government institutions, were the focus of change, the position, for example, of Chalmers Johnson. Revolutionary Change, p. 1.

heritage induce passive obedience and acceptance of political authority, or does it point to critical analysis of prevailing arrangements, with resistance, violence if necessary, a logical outgrowth of this questioning? These problems will be explored in the first two chapters.

The second section, made up of three chapters, will look at the movement itself. We will present the radical Christian explanation of modern politics, as well as the general outlines of the good society which they seek to build. We will also study the various avenues of strategy for political change developed by conflicting schools of thought within the movement. As we will see, some have accepted the necessity for violence in response to ongoing institutions, while others either have grave reservations concerning its use, or completely reject it. Finally, we will study the radical political theology developed by the movement, an attempt to link revolutionary politics with the Biblical message of God.

A third section (chapter 6) will present several areas of analysis critical of radical Christian views. Although we will show that the radical Christians have made some significant steps in blending classical Christian theory with modern revolutionary ideas, we will also show that the movement has failed to deal adequately with the problems of violence and terrorism as they present themselves in the context of the contemporary political world. The failure to solve these problems in the future could threaten the movement, since the



question of violence and its use must be of central importance to a group whose heritage stresses human love and brotherhood. We will also examine the tensions implicit in any group's outlook which tries to balance the ideal of participatory democracy and the workings of a planned, socialist economy. In addition, there may very well be a logical and practical incompatibility between Christian ontology and the modern socialist theory of history and human action. Finally, recent events indicate that the radical Christian analysis of modern politics, developed in the heyday of the 1960s, may be somewhat faulty, if not substantially incorrect. A brief summary chapter at the end of the work will tie together these major points.



## CHAPTER I

THE CHRISTIAN HERITAGE, I: POLITICAL  
OBLIGATION AND RESISTANCE

In its two millennia of existence, Western Christianity has developed a rich tradition regarding the problem of political obligation. As a temporal institution, the organized body of Christian faith over the ages has had to develop and transmit to its adherents a comprehensible set of principles guiding the Christian in his relationships with the many and varied civil governments which have demanded his obedience. Over this period, various conflicting strands of thought have arisen, reflecting divergent, sometimes contradictory, notions of obedience and resistance to political authority, as well as to the creative dynamic of Christianity itself, all of these conceptions have played a key role in the development of the more general body of Western political philosophy.

The Augustinian tradition. Perhaps the most significant and influential Christian theorist of political obligation has been St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, whose views have had a remarkably lasting impact on the Christian tradition as well as on the broader tradition of Western political thought. Augustine's essentially pessimistic view of human nature, temperament, and intentions, undergirds a most conservative political conception which puts a premium on order and stability in human affairs, while forever warning of the innate

tendencies of the human psyche which could shatter that order. Thus, his theories, fashioned to defend Christianity against the charge that the religion's teachings had somehow weakened the social and political fabric of the Roman Empire when faced by the threat of barbaric invasions, bear a curious and probably not accidental resemblance to the later pessimistic and conservative writers, such as Hobbes and Burke.<sup>1</sup>

Central to any understanding of St. Augustine is the idea that all political authority has been ordained by God as a necessary corrective for the human condition after the Fall.<sup>2</sup> In an ideal sense, according to the Church Father, a "true Republic would be an earthly political order founded on the principles of the worship of the true Christian God and the suppression of pagan deities. Any other civil government would be lacking "true justice" and would be a barbaric civic association. A positive good, to Augustine, would be a set of human institutions and a legal structure geared to the above-mentioned principles, thus facilitating human salvation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For the discussion of the relationship between Augustine's writings and the political events of his times, see, for example, Mulford Q. Sibley. Political Ideas and Ideologies: A History of Political Thought. New York: Harper and Row, 1970, p. 180. For more on the link between Augustine and other conservative theorists such as Thomas Hobbes, see text below.

<sup>2</sup>Whitney J. Oates (ed.). Basic Writings of St. Augustine. Vol. 2, New York: Random House, 1948, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 497-498.

Yet, other systems of rule, including even pagan ones, do play a necessary role, in Augustine's view. They are made necessary by the sinful state of post-Fall humanity. By their very nature, earthly governments would restrict some of the worst effects of the Fall, carrying out an essentially negative function by limiting the behavior of imperfect men.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in no way could secular authority be seen as a positive good in itself, though ordained by the prescient wisdom of God. Government, and the force employed by government, was elevated to the level of necessity by the corrupted nature of man and the need to contain that nature so as to preserve peace. Peace is the condition of the highest temporal values, providing the framework wherein the religious duties of man may be undertaken.

This view of secular authority was a distinct break with the earlier body of Western political philosophy handed down from the Greeks. Far from perceiving political life as a key to the development of the best forms of human interaction, Augustine viewed it in utilitarian terms. Governmental institutions served a social peace-keeping function, without which, the highest (and only true and absolute) temporal good, the worship of the Christian God and the attainment of salvation, would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

In other words, a radical transformation in the psychological nature of the human being had occurred at the time of

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

Adam and Eve's fall from grace and subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Once the nature of persons has been corrupted by Original Sin, lust and avarice become the chief characteristics of inter-personal relationships. People eagerly seek wealth, possessions, and mastery over others. Even close personal relationships are no defense against this corrupt human condition, as evidenced by the story of Cain and Abel and later events. "The quarrel between Romulus and Remus shows how the earthly city is divided against itself."<sup>5</sup> Augustine would then inquire: "If home, the natural refuge from the ills of life, is itself not safe, what shall we say of the city (of man), which, as it is larger, is so much the more filled with lawsuits, civil and criminal, and is never free from fear, if sometimes from the actual outbreak, of disturbing and bloody insurrections and civil wars?"<sup>6</sup>

One of the crucial effects of the Fall from Grace, according to Augustine, was the clouding of the individual's moral perception, hence the disintegration of inhibitions controlling potentially negative behavior.<sup>7</sup> In the post-Fall epoch, men had not lost all moral judgement, and were still capable of understanding the basic precept of the natural law--"What thou wouldst not have done to thyself, do not to

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<sup>5</sup>Henry Paolucci (ed.). The Political Writings of St. Augustine. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1962, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup>Whitney J. Oates (ed.). Basic Writings of St. Augustine. Vol. 2, *ibid.*, p. 479.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 255-265; 274.



another." Yet individuals develop an extraordinary capacity to apply this natural law to the actions of others and to consider their own behavior as exceptions to the general rule. Thus, rationalization and self-deception allow the performance of the most heinous acts, and moral myopia serves as the cutting edge for the shattering of social stability and human cooperativeness.

If this is the generalized condition of man's existence, how can social harmony be maintained? How can salvation be achieved if chaos reigns in human affairs? Since the above conditions obtain in all human societies, the answer, of course, is the provision, on the part of the Creator, of some measure of order and stability in human life. Hence, the coercive, regulating institutions and structures of all earthly governments are ordained by God as both a punishment and a remedy for man's sinful condition. Without these regulatory mechanisms, one senses most collective human efforts would be doomed to failure even in utilitarian terms, given the anarchial tendencies residing just below the surface of the observable human character. Still, Augustine maintained that the harsh repressive conditions of earthly governments are grossly imperfect (yet necessary) reflections of the order, peace, and stability that existed prior to the Fall and would exist again in the heavenly Kingdom.

Thus, obedience to earthly rulers, who are ordained by God, is, in reality, obedience to God's Divine Will. Since

the authority for the ruler to command his subjects comes from God, and is part of a divinely-conceived order, Augustine allows for no limitations on his power.<sup>8</sup> Subjects must obey his directives, no matter how cruel or unjust they may be, and disobedience and resistance are specifically ruled out. And, although the Christian is obliged by Augustine to disobey those laws which explicitly run counter to God's laws, he has no right to expect not to be punished by the ruler for the act of disobedience.<sup>9</sup>

We can see then, the enormous conservative impact Augustine's teachings would have on later Church views, especially since the later Church would be organically immersed in European societies which themselves would be highly stratified and would require religious justifications for passive acceptance of those arrangements on the part of the masses. We can also perceive the remarkable similarities between the fundamental assumptions of the Augustinian system, and the viewpoints of later conservative theorists such as Thomas Hobbes. As Deane notes:

"Like Hobbes (who founded his ideas on a purely mechanistic, secular basis), he (Augustine) is keenly aware of the need for a strong power to restrain the boundless appetites and ceaseless conflicts of men. He would agree with Hobbes' warning that any suggestion that resistance or

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 492-494.

<sup>9</sup>Sermons #62, Sect. 13 in Philip Schaff (ed.). A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Vol. 6. Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1886-1888, p. 302.



disobedience in established rulers may be permissible or desirable in certain circumstances would serve as an invitation to anarchy."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the first major contributor to the Christian political tradition provides a dire warning to all those who would seriously challenge the existing social and political order.

The contribution of St. Thomas Aquinas. With St. Thomas Aquinas, writing in the thirteenth century, Aristotelian socio-political views re-emerged in the mainstream of Christian (and Western) political thought, thus providing something of a modification of the extremely pessimistic and authoritarian Augustinian view of the purely negative nature of political institutions. In the Augustinian conception, discussed above, the darker subliminal aspects of human behavior would be repressed by earthly governments for the purposes of order and stability. Opposed to this was the newer conception of the High Middle Ages, which saw a return to the ideals of the Classical Greek polis, whereby human social and political institutions were seen as natural in themselves, and as an ongoing process in which human sociability and cooperativeness emerged out of group association. Human nature would be improved by social bonds and would become elevated to higher levels of rationality. Also contributing to this more positive view of man, coinciding with the

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<sup>10</sup>See Herbert A. Deane, "The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine," in Isaac Kramnick (ed.). Essays in the History of Political Thought. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969, p. 93.

emergence and acceptance of Aristotelian philosophic principles, were far-reaching social changes, including the growth of trade and urban life in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This social dynamism tended to underscore the creative aspects of human nature and undermine the extremely negative conceptions inherited from earlier times.

Aquinas (like Aristotle) saw political institutions and other features of civic life as part of the natural order of man--it was the nature of man to form these social and political associations--and, like Aristotle, he saw all human communities as a mixture of coercion and free association. Because of the religious tradition in which he was immersed however, Aquinas saw these "natural tendencies" as reflections of the cosmic natural order ordained by the Christian God's prescient wisdom and vision. Political institutions, then, were not simply utilitarian devices (as seen by Augustine), but a positive good in themselves, a prominent feature of the historic landscape emanating from the divine will.

As to the foundations of authority and law in these natural associations, Aquinas shared with Aristotle a fundamental belief in the hierarchial character of governance. Since political relationships were firmly grounded in nature, the real foundation of all human interaction must be perceived in the unequal capacities of men.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the justification

<sup>11</sup>A. P. D'Enteves, "Thomas Aquinas," in Isaac Kramnick, Essays in the History of Political Thought, ibid., p. 104.

for holding power resides in the fact that "among men an order is found to exist inasmuch as those who are superior by intellect are by nature rulers."<sup>12</sup> Yet, in the Thomist view, these rulers were as subject to the natural law as were the ruled. Rulership was a trust for the whole community and a particular ruler was justified in what he decreed only insofar as it contributed to the good of that community.<sup>13</sup> He would not be justified in exercising power beyond what was needed to achieve that common good, hence Aquinas' belief that government itself directly serves the highest moral purpose.

Law, according to Aquinas, was "an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has the care of the community, and promulgated," and was established in a hierarchy with God at the pinnacle of the structure, serving as the source of all law. The highest form of law was Eternal Law, the divine essence of God, below which existed Natural Law, a reflection of the Eternal Law, and which consisted of the basic axiomatic first principles of nature and human societies. Perhaps another way of perceiving Natural Law would be to conceive it as the fundamental, unchanging mechanisms of what we, in the twentieth century, call the body of scientific laws, or truths. Along with Natural Law was the Divine

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<sup>12</sup>From Summa Contra Gentiles, part III, in Dino Bigongiari. The Political Ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas, New York: Hafner, 1969, p. xii.

<sup>13</sup>George H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory, 3d Ed, New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965, p. 249.

Law, which Aquinas saw as the body of revealed truth contained in Scripture.

Finally, there existed Positive Law, or those rules which governed all human societies. In the Thomistic view, positive law, although widely divergent, given the wide range of earthly social, economic, political, and geographic circumstances, is an extension of natural law to the particulars of temporal situations. However, harkening back to Augustine, Aquinas recognized the necessity of positive law being supported by coercive power, since humans possessed a strong tendency to allow egoism and passion to cloud their perception of the principles of the Natural Law.

Yet, the positive law, according to Aquinas, could conceivably be unjust, and if unjust, would lose all rights for claiming a binding obligation of obedience on the part of the ruled. For the positive law to be considered unjust, one of two conditions (or both together) would have to be met:

1. The law, or set of laws, would have to be contrary to the common good, that is, "irrational" burdens would have been placed on the community; or
2. The law, or set of laws, would have been promulgated in excess of the ruler's authority, or by a usurper.

Central to Aquinas' conception of the moral purpose of government, mentioned earlier, was the notion of the political community. In the Thomist system, the political community is the entire social organization, ruler and ruled alike, all of whom are obliged to obey the historically derived law. The



community itself would be defined, and tied together, by the shared moral-legal system. Thus, the ruler, though head of the community and its directing force, is also part of it, and his actions must be in accord with the developed body of law and custom. Unlike Hobbes' Leviathan, the moral purpose of rulership implies that authority and power be limited, and that it be exercised within the bounds of community standards. When those standards are breached by one or both of the conditions mentioned earlier, the obligation of obedience is suspended.

But who would decide upon these obviously complex and "essentially contested" conditions of a real-life political order? Neither individuals nor "factions" within a political community could raise a challenge to the duly constituted authority. Aquinas quite clearly warned of the consequences, if such a course of action were pursued:

"Should private persons attempt on their own private presumption to kill the rulers, even though tyrants, this would be dangerous for the multitude as well as for their rulers. This is because the wicked usually expose themselves to dangers of this kind more than the good, for the rule of a king, no less than that of a tyrant, is burdensome to them, since, according to the words of Solomon: 'A wise king scattereth the wicked.' Consequently, by presumption of this kind, danger to the people from the loss of a good king would be more probable than relief through the removal of a tyrant....(during the process of removal of a tyrant by a person or group) very grave dissensions among the people frequently ensue: the multitude may be broken up into factions either during their revolt against the tyrant or in process of the organization of the government after the tyrant has

been overthrown. Moreover, it sometimes happens that while the multitude is driving out the tyrant by the help of some man (or group), the latter, having received the power, there-upon seizes the tyranny."<sup>14</sup>

The dangers to a community from the act of political resistance (no matter which form it takes, selective disobedience or overt action aimed at removing those who hold government power) are so great that Aquinas advised that, if possible, tyrannical rule, if mild enough, and still tolerable, should be endured by the community.<sup>15</sup> However, if the multitudes could endure no longer, resistance should be carried out "not through the private presumption of a few, but rather by public authority."<sup>16</sup> In some communities, this would be the multitude itself, while in others "public authority" would be represented by legally established bodies inferior to the ruler, such as Estates of the Realm. If, in some cases, a ruler owed his position to the appointive power of some higher authority (such as a Church figure), his removal could only be carried out by that higher figure. Finally, "should no human aid whatsoever against a tyrant be forthcoming, recourse must be had to God, the King of all, Who is a helper in due time in tribulation. For it lies in his power to turn the cruel heart of the tyrant to mildness."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 189.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 191.



Aquinas' views towards both political resistance and limitations on government power undoubtedly were influenced by several currents prevalent during medieval times. During this period, social relationships were founded on a contractual basis expressive of the feudal concepts of homage and fealty. A pattern of mutuality existed between different strata of the social order, in which a vassal swore fealty, or loyalty, to a lord, and performed military and other duties in return for a fief. However, the lord was expected to act justly, within the terms of the historically developed system of law and custom. Violation of the expected behavior patterns resulted in the breaking of the contract and the setting free of all parties concerned.

Mutuality extended into political relationships, and a vassal was free of the obligation to obey the law if a lord violated the law of the community. Because of Germanic influence, law and custom were perceived as supreme in the life of the community, and all were obliged to obey its dictates, ruler and ruler alike. In line with this mutual understanding to uphold the integrity of the community's law, vassals were obliged to resist a ruler if he transgressed against the law and his actions degenerated into tyranny.

Distinct from this feudal basis of resistance to tyranny, yet also providing a foundation for the suspension of a ruler's authority, was the influence of ecclesiastical power. Many rulers were consecrated by Church authorities which made them

and their rulership an office of the Church. Thus, over time, the Church acquired the right to decide on the essential questions of whether a ruler remained in power.

Since a ruler was seen as an officer, or deputy, of God, he was tightly bound to God's commands and to divine and natural law as defined and interpreted by the Church. The Pope could then discipline rulers and even suspend their authority by branding them heretic, thus freeing their subjects from the obligation of obedience. The Church could decide who was a "just" ruler and who was a tyrant, and with the growth of this ecclesiastic power, the question of a right of resistance was temporarily shelved, or, more precisely, never had to be asked. In the medieval period, the Church made the decisions that in later centuries would be made, if at all, by the people themselves.

In the writings of Thomas Aquinas then, we find the emergence (save for John of Salisbury, to be mentioned briefly in the conclusion of this chapter) of the idea of a right of impeachment. This right of resistance against established political authority is extremely circumscribed and must be carried out within carefully defined channels. It would probably be more accurate to describe Aquinas' ideas as a "community's right to impeach" a ruler who had transgressed community law, rather than a "right of revolution," which implies pursuit of an ideal goal rather than reestablishment of an old order. This latter form of resistance was precisely

what Aquinas was trying to avoid, since it could very well lead to the rupturing of communal bonds. It would be left to later Christian activists/theorists, such as certain Protestant reformers and millenarian revolutionaries of the Late Middle Ages, to broaden the conception of political resistance.

The Protestant reformers. The first half of the sixteenth century saw the rise of a heterogeneous religious protest against many of the prevailing ideas and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. This Protestant revolt, which eventually led to a great schism in the European Christian community, existed in a broader matrix in which feudal social and economic structures were rapidly breaking down. Political power was gradually shifting away from local nobilities and the overarching Holy Roman Empire and towards the newly emerging national monarchies supported by a rising urban bourgeoisie. This transition, religious and secular, would have important implications for the idea of political obligation, although, as we shall see, some of the early leaders of the Protestant Reformation were quite Augustinian in their views towards disobedience and resistance to secular political authority. "Both (Luther and Calvin) held the view that resistance to rulers is in all circumstances wicked."<sup>18</sup> Only later, when secular governments resisted the free and open practice of Protestantism, and when the inherent individualism contained

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<sup>18</sup>George H. Sabine, *ibid.*, p. 358.

in the body of Protestant thought contributed to the development of the more general notions of Liberalism, would the full impact of this religious philosophy be appreciated.

Martin Luther, Augustinian monk and great German religious reformer, explicitly rejected the papacy and the vast religious bureaucracy of the medieval Roman church. To him, religious faith was based on Scripture and was founded on a one-to-one relationship between an individual and God without mediation by earthly institutions. Since religion was essentially a personalized, inner experience, it is easy to see why the organic religious structure of the feudal era, i.e., the Roman church's Mystical Body of Christ and its implied earthly, top-heavy, bureaucratized structure, was emphatically rejected. However, many observers believe that his conception of an individualized religious experience had an impact beyond the purely religious sphere.<sup>19</sup> To stress a pure privatized spiritual existence would create an attitude of passivity, and perhaps fatalism, in regard to worldly power. Perhaps religion received a long-needed boost in intense spirituality, but secular authority also received support in its claim for demanding the total allegiance of all subjects.

When we examine Luther's own statements on political obligation, we readily perceive how the reformer's ideas on the role of the masses moved in the direction of political passivity. In 1523, Luther published his ideas on political

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<sup>19</sup>See, for example, George H. Sabine, *ibid.*, p. 362.



obligation in a work entitled, Secular Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed, where he revealed his conviction that secular authority was ordained by God: "We must firmly establish secular law and the sword, that no one may doubt that it is in the world by God's will and ordinance."<sup>20</sup> All Christian citizens must obey their governments because of authority's divine source; secular authority is God's method of punishing sinners. Yet Luther was not a total advocate of passive obedience: if conflict should arise between God's Will and the edicts of the earthly ruler, the Christian subject could refuse obedience, though not actively engage in resistance or rebellion.

In Luther's view, the earth's population was divided into two parts, the Realm of Grace and the Realm of Power. The Realm of Grace consisted of those people who possessed inner faith and who would acquire salvation. A world totally populated by people of this type would be a world of love, natural harmony, and social peace. Regrettably, many in the real world belonged to the Realm of Power, people lacking in inner faith and consumed with avarice, lust, and a desire to dominate others for their own sake. Only the power of the state could restrain this latter type and protect the righteous: "it is sufficiently clear and certain that it is God's will that the sword and secular law be used for the punishment

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<sup>20</sup>Walther I. Brandt (ed.). Luther's Works. Vol. 45  
Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962, p. 85.

of the wicked and the protection of the upright."<sup>21</sup> Since the Church Hierarchy had been rejected by Luther, only the state remained as a restraint on sinful human tendencies.

In terms of obedience to secular authority, the true Christian citizen would serve as a model for all to emulate:

"Since, however, a true Christian lives and labors on earth not for himself, but for his neighbor, therefore, the whole spirit of his life impels him to do even that which he need not do, but which is profitable and necessary for his neighbor. Because the sword is a very great benefit and necessary to the whole world, to preserve peace, to punish sin and to prevent evil, he submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays taxes, honors those in authority, serves, helps, and does all he can to further the government, that it may be sustained and held in honor and fear."<sup>22</sup>

These viewpoints, of course, were immensely appreciated by many German princes, who faced growing turmoil among the peasant population as well as continuous attempts by Holy Roman Emperors to reassert political hegemony over their domains. Two years after the publication of his treatise, Luther put his ideas into practice by supporting the princes against the Peasant Revolt.

An historical irony surrounds the teachings and practices of John Calvin and those who later carried forth his creed. Though containing the seeds of an idea of resistance, to flower later, Calvinism, in its initial manifestations, was characterized by a strong denial of any right to disobey or resist

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 94



civil authority. In 1536, at the age of twenty-seven, Calvin published his most famous work, Institutes of the Christian Religion, in which he set out many of his political ideas. Like most other sixteenth century advocates of the divine source of secular power, Calvin placed a strong emphasis on the duty of citizens to obey their secular leaders.<sup>23</sup> If rulers violated God's will, God would rectify the situation, if He wished, not the people. Again, as earlier theorists had maintained, the secular ruler is ordained by, and is a representative of, God; resistance to him is resistance to God. A bad ruler must be accepted as God's visiting punishment on His People, even the faithful:

"Wherefore, if we are inhumanly harassed by a cruel prince; if we are rapaciously plundered by an avaracious or luxurious one; if we are neglected by an indolent one; or if we are persecuted, on account of piety, by an impious and sacrilegious one - let us first call to mind our transgressions against God, which he undoubtedly chastises by these scourges. Thus our impatience will be restrained by humility. Let us, in the next place, consider that it is not in our province to remedy these evils, and that nothing remains for us but to implore the aid of the Lord, in whose hands are the hearts of kings and the revolutions of kingdoms."<sup>24</sup>

Although Calvin's ideas provided no general right of resistance for the masses, in some situations, a few might resist. In some societies, the laws might allow certain

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<sup>23</sup>John T. McNeill (ed.). Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion Vol. 21 of the Library of Christian Classics. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, pp. 1488-1493; 1509-1514.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 1516-1517.

"inferior magistrates" to resist tyranny in the chief of state. As Calvin stated:

"If there be, in the present day, any magistrates appointed for the protection of the people and the moderation of the power of kinds...I am so far from prohibiting them, in the discharge of their duty, to oppose the violence or cruelty of kings that I affirm that if they connive at kings in their oppression of their people, such forbearance involves the most nefarious perfidy because they fraudulently betray the liberty of the people, of which they know that they have been appointed protectors by the ordination of God."<sup>25</sup>

This idea, coupled with the pervasive stress on the individualized conscience contained in Calvinism, would provide an opening for a more general and expanded idea of resistance, especially in those societies where the civil authorities placed barriers in the way of the open expression of Calvinist religious practices. Later, in France and in Scotland under the leadership of John Knox, Calvinists would develop and practice a theory of resistance when Catholic-dominated governments restricted attempts at reform geared toward religious freedom and pluralism.

Millenarian revolts. Although the most lasting religious movements of the first half of the sixteenth century were those mentioned above, another variant of Protestantism briefly flashed across the European scene during the period, causing much socio-political turmoil as well as leaving a lasting mark on the history of Christian political thought. Throughout

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 1519.

the Middle Ages, some people maintained the belief in a literal Second Coming of Christ, as described in the Book of Revelation. This return of the Savior would result in the defeat of the Anti-Christ and the ushering in of an age of love, happiness, and goodness (for the deserving) and an end of disease, starvation, and other forms of human suffering. Combined with the liberalized atmosphere created by the ideas of Luter and other reformers, which, to some extent, undermined the feudal patterns of allegiance and stability in some Central European countries, this belief, as expected, would manifest itself in some unusual ways.

From 1520 to 1525, Thomas Muntzer attempted to organize peasants and others, first at Zwickau, then at Allstedt, and finally, in 1525, at Muhlhausen, where he led a small army of Thuringian peasants against local authorities. This abortive revolt was easily smashed and the leaders, including Muntzer, executed. Meanwhile, almost simultaneous with the demise of the Thuringian insurrection, another movement, known as the Anabaptists, was emerging in southern Germany and in Switzerland.<sup>26</sup> Scholars remain undecided as to the links, direct or indirect, between Muntzer's movement and the Anabaptists, whose more extreme elements finally settled in Munster. Yet many similarities between the two groups existed: both possessed an eschatological outlook and a willingness (at least on the part of some Anabaptists) to use force in bringing about

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<sup>26</sup>See Guenter Lewy. Religion and Revolution. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 116-129.

the new age. As a movement, the Anabaptists began as pacifists, but some became violent later. In addition to other factors, "the ruthless persecution to which the Anabaptists were subjected at first appears to have had a radicalizing effect."<sup>27</sup> Never a homogeneous movement, many remained passive and even submissive to secular political authority.

The more extreme elements of the Anabaptist movement established a center in the city of Münster under the leadership of John Matthys, and later, John Bockelson, aided by Bernhard Rothmann. They purged the city of non-believers and set up a zealous mecca for the faithful. In time, the city was surrounded by hostile forces, and finally taken in June, 1535. Many were massacred in the seizure, and a rapid decline in militant Anabaptist activity took place.

Whether or not there were direct links between Müntzer's group and the more militant among the Anabaptists (as well as the earlier Taborites, a radical outgrowth of the Hussite Movement in Bohemia), nevertheless, strong similarities existed, both in social and theological outlook, and in tactics. Relying on a radical biblical literalism, all of these groups preached an imminent earthly millennium brought about by concerted human action (in line, of course, with the intentions of God). Rebellion would be directed against those earthly obstacles to the new order: the rich, powerful, and corrupt, as well as institutions--governmental, economic, and religious--

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 121.



which undergirded the present, "godless" society. A recurring theme was the attempt to recapture the communalistic spirit of early Christianity, hence, a belief in mutual aid and the sharing of goods--not for purely secular motives of egalitarian social justice, but to show Christian love and brotherhood (interestingly, only a minority of Anabaptists developed the ideal of full economic equality). For this reason, then, the claims of some Marxist scholars, that revolutionary millenarianism appealed basically to the materially impoverished, and that the phenomenon was essentially a class war expressed in religious terms, must be held, at least to some degree, suspect. It is true that many followers came from the lowest strata of society, yet many also came from all walks of life, high as well as low.

One can readily imagine the reaction these groups inspired among the mighty. As was noted earlier, Luther condemned the Anabaptists, as did most reformers, who joined with Catholics in systematically crushing the movement. Muntzer and many other leaders of the various groups, as well as thousands of the faithful, were executed. Thus ended one of the few apocalyptic religious periods where mass movements were explicitly dedicated to the forceful overthrow of the political order. As we will see, many modern religious revolutionaries would look to these sixteenth century rebels for guidance in matters of political obligation and religious values.

Recent papal views. With the rise of capitalist industrialization in nineteenth and twentieth century Western societies, the focal point of politics became the increasing tensions between owners and workers, aggravated by socialist movements which sought the removal of the existing order. Inspired principally by the writing of Karl Marx, these movements, to one degree or another, felt that capitalist domination would be ended only by concerted revolutionary action on the part of an expanding proletariat. Since the state apparatus was probably little more than "an executive, coordinating committee of the ruling class," that set of institutions would also have to be assaulted in order to transcend capitalist society and reach the socialist stage of societal organization. Little wonder then, that this state of affairs held the potential for vast social and political turmoil, probably of a violent nature in its final stages.

In the encyclical Rerum Novarum released in May 1891, Pope Leo XIII addressed the complex issues involved in the situation. The Pope, in no uncertain terms, condemned an unrestricted capitalism accompanied by an individualistic liberal ethic as the root cause of the social dislocations. He saved his most cutting remarks, however, for what he called the "pseudo-solution" of socialism.<sup>28</sup> Although capitalist greed had

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<sup>28</sup>Sidney Z. Ehler and John B. Morrall (eds. and translators) Church and State Through the Centuries: A Collection of Historic Documents with Commentaries. New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1967, p. 321.



created intolerable, debasing conditions in the lives of working people, the notion of sustained class hatred and conflict was simply not acceptable. "Instead the Pope put forward the ideal of a harmonious cooperation between the two equally essential forces of Capital and Labor,"<sup>29</sup> founded on the principles of Christian love, brotherhood, and respect for social order and tranquility.

In words reflecting the organic social tradition of the Church, Leo remarked:

"The great mistake made in regard to the matter now under consideration, is to take up with the notion that class is naturally hostile to class, and that the wealthy and the working men are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict. So irrational and so false is this view that the direct contrary is the truth. Just as the symmetry of the human frame is the result of the suitable arrangement of the different parts of the body, so in a State is it ordained by nature that these two classes should dwell in harmony and agreement, so as to maintain the balance of the body politic. Each needs the other: Capital cannot do without Labor, nor Labor without Capital. Mutual agreement results in the beauty of good order; while perpetual conflict necessarily produces confusion and savage barbarity."<sup>30</sup>

"Religion teaches the laborer and the artisan to carry out honestly and fairly all equitable agreements freely entered into; never to injure the property, nor to outrage the person, of an employer; never to resort to violence in defending their own cause, nor to engage in riot or disorder; and to have nothing to do with men of evil principles, who work upon the people with artful promises of great results, and excite foolish hopes which usually end in useless regrets and grievous loss."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 332.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 333.

"There are not a few...eager for revolutionary change, whose main purpose is to stir up disorder and incite their fellows to acts of violence. The authority of the State should intervene to put restraint upon such firebrands, to save the working classes from being led astray by their manoeuvres, and to protect lawful owners from spoilation."<sup>32</sup>

Thus, class conflict in the revolutionary socialist framework was ruled out for the working class, which was admonished to cooperate with Capital and the rulers of the state in order to achieve social justice and harmony. Earlier, in the encyclical Quod Apostolici Muneris, issued in December 1878, Leo, employing the same logic to be used later in Rerum Novarum, presented his views on the specific question of political resistance:

"And if at any time it happens that the power of the state is rashly and tyrannically wielded by Princes, the teaching of the Catholic Church does not allow an insurrection on private authority against them, lest public order be only the more disturbed, and lest society take greater hurt therefrom. And when affairs come to such a pass that there is no other hope of safety, she teaches that relief may be hastened by the merits of Christian patience and by earnest prayers to God."<sup>33</sup>

The same theme was sounded by Pope Pius XII lecturing Italian workers in 1943:

"Salvation and justice are not found in revolution but in evolution through concord. Violence has always achieved only destruction, not construction; the kindling of passions, not their pacification;

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>33</sup>Guenter Lewy. The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, p. 333.

the accumulation of hate and ruin, not the reconciliation of the contending parties. And it has reduced men and parties to the difficult task of rebuilding, after sad experience, on the ruins of discord."<sup>34</sup>

Yet, when we examine the Church's position regarding political obligation during the first half of the twentieth century, we hardly find a model of consistency. While Pius XII's remarks to Italian workers remain in line with earlier papal positions on political obedience and resistance, the Church would occasionally deviate from this hard and fast rule if political conditions required flexibility. When rebellious movements friendly to the Church arose, Church teaching moved to a position of acceptance of resistance and revolt under certain circumstances.<sup>35</sup> In 1927, Mexican bishops supported the "Cristeros" revolt against the strongly anti-clerical government of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI). In 1937, Spanish bishops sided with the rebel Franco against the Second Spanish Republic, an anti-clerical government supported by a domestic Left and socialists and communists from around the world, including the U.S.S.R. In the light of these circumstances, Pope Pius XI, in the encyclical Firmissimam Constantiam (March, 1937), backed off from earlier papal stands against any form of resistance, and drew distinctions between

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<sup>34</sup>Quoted by George Celestin, "A Christian Looks at Revolution," in Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman. New Theology No. 6. London: The Macmillan Co., 1969, p. 99.

<sup>35</sup>See Guenter Lewy. The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany. Ibid., Chapter 12, especially pp. 333-334.

just and unjust insurrections. Resistance, he declared, is an act of self-defense against those leaders who are destroying a nation and leading it to ruin. The means employed by rebels must not be intrinsically evil, thus bringing greater harm to the community than the harm they are intended to remedy.

In much the same vein, the present Pontiff, Paul VI, in Populorum Progressio, states:

"A revolutionary uprising - save where there is a manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental personal rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country - produces new injustices, throws more elements out of balance and brings on new disasters. A real evil should not be fought against at the cost of greater misery."<sup>36</sup>

In summary then, we find a certain ambiguity clouding the Church's position on political obligation. It appears that the Catholic hierarchy uses great flexibility in supporting or condemning regimes and rebel movements which are either supportive or hostile to the continued institutional survival of the Church and its strictly conceived religious functions: freedom of worship, the carrying out of liturgical services, the administration of sacraments, etc.<sup>37</sup> This flexibility has both positive effects and drawbacks, as Guenter Lewy describes:

"The ambiguity of the Church's position on the legitimacy of resistance to constituted authority is of considerable advantage, for with it she can sail a flexible course adaptable to the

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<sup>36</sup>George Celestin, *ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>37</sup>Guenter Lewy. The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany. *Ibid.*, Chapter 12.



ebb and flow of the tides of circumstances. But such cautious helmsmanship, such waiting on the sidelines of history, leaves the individual Catholic burdened with a decision in the making of which he should have moral guidance from his Church."<sup>38</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Two individuals of the first half of the twentieth century, through their writings and deeds, would serve as inspiring models for the Christian rebels of later decades. Both Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr, while experiencing the tumultuous early decades of the century of crisis, provided guidelines for Christian observers in their confrontations with oppressive institutions, both public and private. Bonhoeffer's dramatic life and death would serve as a personal witness to the lone individual's rejection of unspeakable tyranny, while the young Niebuhr's writings set the foundation for a Christian right of resistance, remarkably similar to the ideas propounded by the Christian radicals of the 1960s.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer anticipated the New Left Christian radicals by developing, in his writings, a vision of man progressing towards a position of historical autonomy while simultaneously speaking of a God "immersed in human history."<sup>39</sup> He shifted the emphasis away from the traditional, metaphysical view of God "out there," to a view of God as part of the

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>39</sup>Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Letters and Papers from Prison. New York: Macmillan, 1962, pp. 191-214. Edited and translated by Eberhard Bethge.

empirical world of human affairs. In addition, he severely criticized the then-fashionable inward-looking existentialist theologies. Rather than dwelling on the bleak notions of his early-twentieth century European peers, Bonhoeffer proposed a positive, outward-looking, social view of man and his achievements in history. Perhaps the greatest achievement would be personal commitment in the struggle against tyranny.

Bonhoeffer had the opportunity to live his theology. Refusing to take part in the Nazi cooptation of the German Christian churches (part of the regime's attempt to lend legitimacy to their rule, which most churchmen went along with), Bonhoeffer went underground rather than support the creation of a "Nazi-Christian culture." He soon joined a resistance group which attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler. In the aftermath of the failed attempt, members of the conspiracy, including Bonhoeffer, were rounded up by the German security forces. In the closing days of the war, Bonhoeffer, and most of the others, were executed.

Influenced by Marxian notions of social justice, as were many intellectuals at the height of the Depression, Reinhold Niebuhr described a dual conception of human morality which might inspire the Christian citizen to resistance, perhaps even violent resistance.<sup>40</sup> Individual men, in Niebuhr's scheme, were capable of the selfless love towards others,

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<sup>40</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr. Moral Man and Immoral Society. New York: Scribner's, 1932. Especially chapters 7 and 8.



prescribed by God. But in a collective sense, selfless love (and a politics of reform based on love between all men, regardless of class) was quite unrealistic, and stood in the way of the realization of a more easily attained, yet far more imperfect, social justice. To Niebuhr, individual selfless love was lost when the individual became subordinated to the self-interest and self-perpetrating dynamics of collective relationships. The reality of human behavior in the group setting made the politics of reform (based on love) of earlier progressive religious groups like the Social Gospel Movement quite utopian. What could be achieved was a rough approximation of justice based on the rationalized balance of power between groups and classes which would lead to an equality of burdens and benefits in society.

To attain this social justice, which he considered to be more important than social peace, Niebuhr advanced the idea that resistance, perhaps violent in nature, could be justified in certain situations.<sup>41</sup> Breaking with the pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, Niebuhr believed that armed revolution might be morally justified in conditions of extreme oppression. Violence was a tactical option, relative to the situation, although something to be used sparingly, with non-violent forms of resistance given priority. In discussing the situation of American blacks, Niebuhr advocated the use of tax revolts and economic boycotts, since revolutionary

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

violence would, in that situation, be suicidal. Violent resistance carried out by a minority with no broad support could easily lead to the obliteration of the rebels by the oppressor's forces.

Later, perhaps influenced by the carnage of World War II and the totalitarianism of Stalin's Russia, Niebuhr backed off considerably from his earlier pro-resistance stance, acquiring a deeper appreciation of man's egoism and other dark features of the human psyche.<sup>42</sup> He came to believe that man's imperfect capacity to love led him on a quest for justice, but man's egoism prevented the full realization of the Marxian ideal of collective love and equality.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, the pursuit of absolutist notions of justice easily led to the horrors of war and totalitarianism. The cult of rationality, technology, and great progress, entertained by both Liberalism and Marxism, was a cruel delusion, an attempt to realize the unrealizable. The Kingdom of God always remained outside of man, outside of time itself, forever limiting contemporary man and his present achievements. For this reason, balancing radical hopes and conservative fears, Niebuhr came to believe that the best condition we could hope

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<sup>42</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr. The Nature and Destiny of Man. New York: Scribner's, 1941; and especially The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of its Traditional Defense. New York: Scribner's, 1944.

<sup>43</sup>The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, pp. 86-118.

for was the incrementalist environment of the American-style political belief system. The consensual balancing of social forces, and notions of limited government characteristic of pluralist democracy, with all its admitted shortcomings, was the best method of restraining man's essential nature while achieving some rough form of justice.

Political obligation in the mid-twentieth century: A Protestant view. "The right to resist an established political authority has been one of the open questions that have divided Christians from the beginning."<sup>44</sup> With that accurate statement, John C. Bennett begins a chapter on the continuing controversy over political obligation in his Christians and the State, one of the more important recent Protestant contributions to Christian political thought. Stating that "the general background of thought in the New Testament had created a strong religious and theological inhibition against any kind of political resistance,"<sup>45</sup> Bennett goes on to outline the history of Christian notions of political obligation before presenting the problem in the context of mid-twentieth century life.

The gist of Bennett's ideas on the problem points strongly in the direction of caution and deep soul-searching before

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<sup>44</sup>John C. Bennett. Christians and the State. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958, p. 68. For another twentieth century Protestant view of political society, see Emil Brunner. The Divine Imperative. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

embarking on a course of political resistance.<sup>46</sup> Although admitting that some governmental orders can be positively demonic (the recent Nazi experience as a prime example) and probably should be resisted, the idea of living in a society with a temporary breakdown in some sort of governmental structure is downright frightening. Restating the traditional Christian conception of the moral anarchy which dwells just below the surface of human nature, Bennett provides a long footnote wherein Lord Macauley describes life in London between the abandonment of the throne by James II and the restoration of order by William III. This passage is obviously intended to show the large residue of criminality, thrill-seeking, and scapegoat-baiting which exists in any otherwise "normal" population. According to Bennett, however, this "does not mean that there should be no active political resistance but it helps us to see what is at stake."<sup>47</sup>

In most contemporary Western societies, democratic processes are at work to mitigate the worst oppressive tendencies. And although some individuals may find an occasional need to "loyally disobey" some particular law issued forth by these processes, ultimately the common good will be realized with a minimum of strife. "Respect for these (democratic) processes is itself a part of Christian responsibility, and it is one of the modern equivalents of the obedience to authorities

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 72-74.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 73.



which is enjoined in the New Testament."<sup>48</sup> So matters stood in 1958, before the "troubles," or awareness of "troubles," began to emerge in Western, and particularly American, life.

Conclusions. It is obvious then, that a modern Christian, probing his or her religion's philosophic heritage, can find conflicting sources of ideas concerning political obligation. From Augustine, the Protestant Reformers, and the Roman Catholic hierarchy, one receives stern warnings against disrupting those habits of obedience which hold civil society together in the face of primal, centrifugal tendencies in the human spirit. Flowing from Biblical sources describing the Fall from grace with its subsequent effects on human character, and supported by modern conceptions of human nature found in the writings of Hobbes and Freud, these generally conservative approaches emphasize the necessity of earthly governmental order, virtually any order.

Diametrically opposed to this view is a hopeful, apocalyptic tradition in Christianity, best exemplified by the radical Anabaptists.<sup>49</sup> For these people, a life of struggle and communitarian grace will usher in an age in which all earthly

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>49</sup>In addition to the Radical Anabaptists, mentioned above, see Michael Walzer, The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965, Ch. 8. In this work, Walzer described the resistance theories of the Puritan forces in the English Civil War, who justified their opposition to the royalist forces on the grounds of establishing the will of God in a new earthly order.



structures of abusive power and privilege will have been smashed. Methods ranging from selective disobedience to wholesale violence are advocated, usually the latter. These groups usually point out the communalistic character of early persecuted Christianity as the "genuine" nature of the religion, and as a model for all earthly institutions.

Not quite so hopeful or apocalyptic, yet offering, through word and deed, a model for others to follow later, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the young Reinhold Niebuhr spoke to a troubled twentieth century in which oppressive political systems occupy the center state of human concern. These two theologian-activists helped to make resistance to political authority a respectable subject for discussion, at the very least, a chance for the tradition we have described above.

Holding down the center of the spectrum, and advocating a strongly qualified right of resistance is Thomas Aquinas, who feared the effects on society when the positive law of the ruler seriously diverged from the dictates of the Natural Law, or when rulership itself was usurped by someone violating the laws of the community. In those instances, some form of challenge to the ruler was justified, but only by some cor-porative entity, thus avoiding the equally divisive effects on the community occurring when an individual or faction decided on their own that the ruler required removing. A century earlier, John of Salisbury developed ideas substantially in agreement with Aquinas, holding that a ruler who violated the

organic law tying all elements of society together could be killed, if necessary, to achieve removal.

In any case, disobedience, or open resistance to political authority has never been taken lightly by the Christian tradition. Only in very grave circumstances in which the community would suffer, or individual spiritual and/or physical well-being would be severely jeopardized by the continuation of existing socio-political relationships, did certain theorists or movements advocate a theory of action against an oppressive regime. For the most part, the mainstream of the Christian tradition, skeptical of those positions which claim that man can make significant improvements in his earthly life, has opted for a position in which social tranquility is put prior to the attainment of social justice. It is in this kind of an environment that church leaders have seen the best possibility of Christianity accomplishing its most important tasks: worshipping and propagating the word of God.

## CHAPTER II

## THE CHRISTIAN HERITAGE II: THE MORAL USE OF VIOLENCE

Traditionally, established Christianity has been consistent in its outright condemnation of violence. The admonition of the Fifth Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill," and Christ's instructions to turn the other cheek rather than seek revenge both serve as the cornerstones of an institutional restriction on all human behavior which inflicts death or injury on other persons. These restrictions on violent behavior presented no problem until, fairly early on, the Christian found himself caught in a conflict between the teachings of his church and the commands of his government, or those of his own conscience. Frequently, rulers demanded that their citizens participate in military activities directed against other societies, or else take part in police action aimed at deviant members of the community. Less frequently, Christian citizens may have been tempted to defend themselves against Roman persecution, acting in the eyes of some, in terms of intolerable repression.

Because of these conflicts, various Christian thinkers began to fashion exceptions to the ban on violence. These exceptions became part of Christianity's general body of theory dealing with the morally justified use of force in human affairs. As we shall see, these conceptions were very much linked to the writers' general notions of political obligation.

Because of his general ideas on the nature of man and the need for order within a society, St. Augustine tended to

dismiss directly the question of the justified use of force by a citizen or citizens against their own ruler. Resistance to public authority was ruled out in all situations, regardless of the means employed. Violent resistance would probably be considered in a harsher light, only because of its greater tendency to unleash those primal forces which are destructive of whatever limited good can be achieved in civil society. Yet St. Augustine did not rule out all forms of violence in human affairs. His utilitarian approach toward temporal order made him realize that, although the use of force is evil, it might still be the lesser evil in some situations, producing or maintaining a better, though of course far from perfect, situation in the future.

The area of human behavior where Augustine considered violence to be morally justified (besides the internal situation where the ruler and his agents might suppress unrest), and only in certain circumstances, was in the state of war between societies.<sup>1</sup> In Augustine's view, all defensive wars (and Christian participation in them) were just.<sup>2</sup> An

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<sup>1</sup>See Book 19, Chapters 7 and 12, and Book 22, Chapter 6 of the City of God in Whitney J. Oates (ed.). Basic Writings of St. Augustine. Vol. 2. (New York: Random House, 1948), pp. 481-482, 485-487, and 615-617 respectively. Also consult Letter #189 in St. Augustine. Selected Letters. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930, pp. 323-333, translated by James H. Baxter. Also "Contra Faustum," Book 22, Section 75, in Philip Schaff (ed.). A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Vol. 4, (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1886-1888), p. 301.

<sup>2</sup>Book 22, Chapter 6 in City of God, in Oates, (ed.), pp. 615-617.

offensive war was morally justified if two general conditions were met.<sup>3</sup> First, the war declared by the ruler must be aimed at the restoration of a relatively just peace and future inter-societal tranquility. Secondly, the perpetrating society's intentions must be correct, that is, initiating war for the purpose of righting some wrong. A "wrong" might be construed to mean the receiving state's failure to make reparations for the malicious action of its citizens, or its wrongful appropriation of the property of a citizen of the initiating state. In other words, a "wrong" was something generally agreed upon by all societies as being detrimental to a just human order. If these two conditions were met, then the war, and Christian participation in it, were morally defensible.

Augustine was adamant about these reasons for an offensive war. War was not to be initiated for reasons of personal revenge, or the lust of domination over others, or for the "adventure" of war. War is inherently evil, a reflection of the disturbances brought about by the Fall from Grace. But it may on occasion be a necessary evil, carried out to restore order to human affairs, and an order establishing a juster condition (as imperfect as that must necessarily be in the City of Man) than existed prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

The individual Christian must obey his ruler anyway, Augustine admitted regretfully, even in situations of an unjust

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<sup>3</sup>Book 19, Chapters 7 and 12 in City of God, in Oates (ed.), pp. 481-482.



war. But in the just war situation, the Christian citizen was morally obliged to partake in military activities.<sup>4</sup> A right of pacifism claimed by a Christian citizen in the condition of a just war is wrong, since a cruel, unjust situation is allowed to continue. The Christian individual must follow his ruler and do all he can to right the wrong and reestablish the peace as quickly as possible.

Like Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas had grave reservations about the employment of violence in earthly affairs, especially within the community. Although Aquinas loosened the bonds of political obligation somewhat, by allowing a very carefully conditioned right to remove a ruler when that ruler violated community norms (see previous chapter), one gets the impression that Aquinas perceived violent methods of removal as the absolute last resort. However, Aquinas, like Augustine, recognized that collective violence carried out by societies against one another could conceivably be justified, and in the formulation of the conditions of a just war, was heavily influenced by the writings of the Bishop of Hippo.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>"Contra Faustum," Book 22, Section 75, in Schaff (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 301.

<sup>5</sup>St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II-II (Part 2 of the Second Part), Q. 40, Art. 1, pp. 577-579 in The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas Vol. 2., Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1952. Great Books of the Western World, Robert M. Hutchins (ed.). Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, revised by Daniel J. Sullivan. In this section of the Summa Theologica, Aquinas quotes Augustine at great length, borrowing heavily from his predecessor's ideas.

Aquinas set out four conditions, all of which had to be met before a war could be considered just. First, the war had to be declared by the sovereign power (public authority), no matter what form this sovereign appeared in. In other words, there could be no private wars carried out by individuals or factions. By limiting sole power to initiate the moral use of collective violence to the sovereign, Aquinas was also protecting the sovereign from private, popular wars carried out by the masses of that society. Secondly, the war had to have a "just cause," that is, the society attacked (if an offensive war) must have deserved it because of some wrong performed by them. Thirdly, the intentions of the initiators of the war had to be "correct," that is, to sincerely advance a good and just cause and suppress some wrong, not to use idealistic reasons as an excuse to engage in violence for petty revenge, selfish conquest, or as a means of alleviating social boredom. Finally, the level of violence used could not create greater harm than did the wrong to be remedied. Like Augustine, Aquinas took Christian participation in violent behavior as a very serious problem, and therefore placed a number of restrictions on it. These restrictions themselves clearly indicate that some high-level earthly goods might be realized only after the use of violence. This last point would have a great impact on the attempts of modern-day Christian radicals to fashion strategic and tactical responses to the overwhelming power of political

institutions deemed oppressive and unjust.

As we saw in the last chapter, Martin Luther's view of the ideal Christian citizen certainly implied that individuals should loyally assist their rulers in restraining their fellow citizens who belonged to the Realm of Power. Clearly this points in the direction of Christian participation in what we call today the police power of the state. Since the police power very often brings about the use of violence against people, Luther can be said to have clarified this point for the general body of Christian political theory (if it had to be clarified at all--by this time it was considered a matter of course for Christians to take part in internal violent activities legitimized by the state). A practical consequence of Luther's position was the increased use of state power, sometimes violent in nature, for purposes of creating Protestant orthodoxy.

By the early twentieth century, major spokesmen had influenced the Christian heritage by charting out exceptions to the structure on violent behavior. Now Christian citizens could function in their society's internal security forces as well as the external security force since by now virtually all wars were considered "just." But individuals were still forbidden to engage in purely private violence. In addition, in keeping with the Christian mainstream's strongly conservative views on political obligation, a major (and increasingly important) category of collective political violence,

resistance against one's own ruling order, was still considered to be a form of sinful private violence.

The young Reinhold Niebuhr would be the first major Christian spokesman to advance the idea that in certain situations, this final category of political violence might be morally justified.<sup>6</sup> As we noted in the last chapter, Niebuhr broke with the mainstream of the Christian heritage by refusing to accept the idea that social peace was the crucial value to be upheld in history. He believed that in certain situations of extreme oppression, armed revolt might be a justifiable option, although one to be carefully and sparingly employed. Nonviolent forms of resistance should be given priority, while violent outbursts with no possible hope at eventual success should be avoided, since these latter actions would result in unnecessary human suffering unrelated to the achievement of any future social good.

In summary then, we can see that major Christian writers have linked their ideas on the moral use of force and violence with their notions of the proper relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Those who would restrict the people's right to resist authority have also been careful to justify violence only in external situations, or else in internal peace-keeping situations clearly sanctioned by the state. On the other hand, those who, like the young Niebuhr, perceive

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<sup>6</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr. Moral Man and Immoral Society. New York: Scribners, 1932. Chapters 7 and 8.

domestic unjustic, and who believe that the alleviation of this condition is not only possible, but of a higher priority than simple social tranquility, are inclined, at least, to discuss the possibility that internal collective violence directed against the powerful is within the realm of Christian morality. Suffice it to say, the mainstream of the Christian tradition has accepted the former view. And it is this view, with minority voices like the young Niebuhr's in opposition, that has, to this day, formed the intellectual environment within which modern Christian radicals must operate. And as we shall see, these contemporary rebels have felt obliged to come to grips with this environment, by attempting to formulate a coherent justification for revolutionary violence in this troubled age.



## C H A P T E R   I I I

## THE MOVEMENT I:   AN OVERVIEW

Introduction. Numerous commentators have described the 1950s as the Silent Decade, a period in which the developed Western nations experienced the establishment of a politics of consensus. Social and political stability marked the muting of the conflicts of previous decades, as politicians and academicians proudly proclaimed both the end of ideological conflict and the emergence in Europe and North America of social orders based on pragmatic adjustment of social problems and an explosion of economic growth and prosperity unparalleled in human history. Beneath the placid surface of these societies, however, and particularly in the United States, there existed unresolved tensions which first manifested themselves in the last years of the decade and which would flower in the next decade, creating a period of turmoil in marked contrast to the preceding years. Concurrently, problems and crises were developing in those areas of the world which had recently gained their formal independence from the nations of Western Europe, as well as in Latin America, an area, though long independent, which had failed to achieve the material prosperity of other Western nations.

In the United States, race and poverty were the first problems to arise in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Though formally equal before the law, black Americans began vociferously to assert their demands for an end to second-class

citizenship and for participation in the economic and political mainstreams of American life. Claiming to be the victims of an "institutional racism" in which the political and social processes of the nation simply ignored their plight, blacks slowly escalated their political action, from litigation and sit-ins, demonstrations, and voter registration drives, to rioting, and the formation of groups explicitly dedicated to revolution and group separatism.

Idealistic, and for the most part young, Americans soon discovered that racial minorities were not the only people living in poverty. Although the economic growth of the post-World War II era had created a level of prosperity never before realized, and enjoyed by a wider percentage of the population, a disturbingly large minority of Americans, white and black, had simply been bypassed by this social transformation. The American political system would later respond to this situation with a "war on poverty," but the revelation deeply disturbed some progressive people, and would later influence the emerging New Left.

By the mid-1960s, the war in Viet Nam, and, to a lesser extent, the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion, the landing of Marines in the Dominican Republic, and other examples of American overseas involvement, spurred the creation of a movement which increasingly condemned not only the war effort, but the entire foundation of American foreign policy. Anti-war demonstrations, draft resistance, and disruptive activities in

general were stepped up, leading to massive, and sometimes violent, confrontations between dissidents and government authority. Some activists and followers condemned the government's actions out of a sense of pacifistic moral outrage, while others saw a more sinister pattern of neo-colonialism, government behavior aimed at squelching the self-determination of Third World peoples.

It was at this point in time that the issues of the war and overseas involvement, along with race, poverty, and inequality, coalesced and provided the impetus for the formation of a more or less loosely structured movement known as the New Left. Spearheaded by such groups as the Students for a Democratic Society (founded by essentially liberal students in 1962) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (which would later be succeeded by groups such as the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army), this aggregation of intellectuals, students, and activist groups, both black and white, would develop a more radical base of theoretical criticism and style of political activity. Though seldom working together in any coordinated fashion, and animated by a sometimes intense anarchistic spirit, the elements of the New Left created a rough working political theory which questioned the claims of the American political system as to its supposed democratic and open nature. Pointing to racism, poverty, militarism, and sexism as manifestations of a political order more and more tightly controlled by a government-corporate

power elite, the New Left focused on the "barren," "inauthentic," psychosocial aspects of American life, formed by an uncritical, "one-dimensional" culture.<sup>1</sup>

In Europe, a New Left was also forming among students and activists. Although for the most part lacking the issues of racism, poverty, and war, the European New Left leveled its criticisms at the increased bureaucratic regimentation and alienating aspects of modern, capitalist, post-industrial societies. In May, 1968, student activists, in alliance with some workers, nearly toppled the government of French President Charles DeGaulle. In Eastern Europe, student activism contributed to a climate of political liberalization in some countries, especially Czechoslovakia, where a reformist government was eventually suppressed by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968.

In the non-Western, non-Communist, lesser developed areas of the world, particularly Latin America and Southeast Asia, resistance was building up against what was considered to be a new form of indirect political and economic colonialism. This relationship between the "First" World (capitalist and developed) and the Third World was seen by emerging radical liberation movements as exploitive, and responsible for the chronic underdevelopment of these new nations. As a result, resistance movements sprang up in Indo-China, Malaysia, Indonesia, in

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Herbert Marcuse. One Dimensional Man. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964, and by the same author, An Essay on Liberation. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969.



many parts of Black Africa, and in many nations in Latin America, where one nation, Cuba, succeeded in breaking its long-standing relationship with the United States, and served thereafter as a symbol of national liberation. Even less radical governments and political movements accepted all or some of the arguments concerning the exploitive nature of modern international political relationships and the operation of the world trade system, so that there emerged the notion of a common Third World.

In these years of tumultuous intellectual and political climates of North America, Europe, and the Third World, it is not surprising that some practicing Christians, laity and clerics, would become caught up in some of these ideas and activities. The following pages will describe several areas of Christian participation in this period of increasingly radical political activity and thinking: conferences and conference reports and subsequent activity on the part of organized religions and religious associations, the activities of individuals and small groups of Christian clerics and lay persons actually engaged in resistance and revolutionary activity, the closer relationship established between some Christians and some Marxists, mostly in Europe, and finally, the flowering of a new political theology expressly designed to reflect the newly emerging patterns of radical Christian political thought and action.



In a way, it is somewhat misleading to separate the various activities into those sections just described. In doing so, one loses the flavor of concurrent historical development, in which theologizing, revolutionary activity on the part of individuals and groups, and institutional religious activity of a political nature all occurred simultaneously and reinforced each other. Also, it must be remembered (and will become obvious in later sections of this work) that not all activists, theologians, and elements of institutionalized religions completely agreed with one another on basic theoretical positions, nor on the nature of action directed towards changing contemporary political and social arrangements.

Conferences between church officials, Christian intellectuals, and theologians played a key role in the formation of a radicalized political position during the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s. Not only would these meetings (of which some of the more important are mentioned below) focus on social and political issues as well as possible solutions to problems, but would also go a long way towards politicizing numerous other clerics and followers of the various religions. The Christian Peace Conference, held in Prague in 1958, and organized by J. L. Hromodka, would lead, later, to the All-Christian Peace Assemblies of 1961, 1964, and 1968. These ecumenical gatherings brought together church officials and thinkers from Western nations, the Communist bloc, and the

Third World, and would focus on problems of international politics, world peace, and underdevelopment.

Focus on the political, economic, and social problems of international trade and Third World underdevelopment did not achieve important consideration by Christians until two major conferences sponsored by the World Council of Churches. The first WCC panel, the Conference on Church and Society, was held in Geneva, in 1966, and issued its now-famous, four-volume report: "Christians in the Technical and Social Revolution of our Time."<sup>2</sup> A second WCC conference, the Zagorsk Consultation on Theological Issues of Church and Society, was held in Moscow in 1968. In 1968, the Committee on Society, Development, and Peace (SODEPAX) was set up jointly by the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace. After the initial meeting in Beirut in April, 1968, this ecumenical group would meet again at various times for the next three years, and would study the issues of underdevelopment as well as propose solutions for the problems identified by the conference planners.

The unusual and unexpected discussion between Christian and Marxist intellectuals may have had its start in West Germany in 1958 and 1959, when clerics and theologians interested in Marxian ideas established the Marxism Commission of the Study Fellowship of the Evangelical Academies. This led

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<sup>2</sup>Representative articles from these four volumes can be found in Harvey Cox (ed.). The Church Amid Revolution. New York: Association Press, 1967.

to informal discussions between representatives of the two camps, and later conferences such as the meeting held at Mariánské Lázně, Czechoslovakia in 1967, sponsored by Paulus-Gesellschaft and the Sociological Institute of the Czechoslovakian Academy of Sciences. The following year saw the Consultation of Christians and Marxists at Geneva, organized and sponsored by the World Council of Churches.

The intense revolutionary situation in Latin America which was inspiring Christian participation on a wide scale, also spawned its share of conferences and study sessions. A meeting of Latin American Christian Revolutionaries, lay persons and clerics, was held in Montevideo in February, 1968, and was followed by the headline-grabbing General Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) at Medellín, Colombia a few months later. Following this, in the United States, the American Catholic Bishop's Committee for Latin America, meeting in Davenport, Iowa, would focus on the same political and social issues raised by Latin American revolutionaries and spokesmen of the CELAM conference. One of the high points of this meeting was a stirring address by Richard Shaull, a Protestant missionary and theologian who had become deeply involved in the revolutionary movements of Central America.

While the representatives of religious institutions were meeting to discuss the political issues of the modern age, ordinary Christian men and women, parish priests and ministers, bishops, missionaries, and lay persons, were becoming actively

involved in political action, sometimes of a violent, revolutionary nature. Latin America was undoubtedly the scene of the most widespread Christian resistance, with Camilo Torres, the revolutionary priest, serving as the key symbol of this new political stance. Yet to center on Torres' life diverts attention away from the less sensational, but nonetheless crucial, political action of thousands of Latin American clerics and lay persons, mostly Catholic, but some Protestant as well. A perfect example would be Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator working with destitute peasants in that nation's northeast plantation area, a locale where desperate near-feudal conditions still prevail. Freire's activities consisted primarily of a process known as "concientizacion," whereby peasants would become literate through teaching methods which focused on an awareness of their oppressed condition and an understanding of political processes which might change that condition.<sup>3</sup>

The Golconda Group, revolutionary priests working among the poor in the barrios of Colombia's urban areas, shared with Paulo Freire a desire to educate and organize these oppressed groups in order to facilitate revolutionary political action, hopefully of a non-violent type. As we will see later, Golconda is typical of those Latin American Christians who would

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<sup>3</sup>Paulo Friere, "Education, Liberation, and the Church," in Alistair Kee (ed.). A Reader in Political Theology. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974, pp. 100-106. See also Rosemary R. Ruether. Liberation Theology. New York: Paulist Press, 1972, Ch. 10.



like to fashion a revolutionary political theology based on praxis, rather than on the isolated intellectual models of earlier theological traditions. In other areas of the continent, Dominican priests have offered sanctuary to Brazilian urban guerrillas, Protestant missionaries have actively assisted the Uruguayan Tupamaro revolutionary group, while U. S. church groups have funded liberation groups in Latin America, as well as in South Africa and Mozambique.<sup>4</sup> Maryknoll missionaries Thomas and Arthur Melville and Blaise Bonpane were expelled from Guatemala for organizing peasants and supporting guerrillas, while Bolivian priests issued ultimatums to their religious superiors, demanding that they return church-owned land to peasants and to reject government subsidies for their schools.<sup>5</sup>

In Europe, radical Christians have organized to effect public opinion within Christian communities, as well as carrying out organizing activity for the purpose of radical social change. Britain has witnessed the formation of the Slant Group, New Left-oriented Catholic Marxists who seek to bring political-religious dialogue informed by Marxist ideas into the mainstream of that nation's lay Catholic discussion. In France, radical Catholic groups such as Temoignage Chretien and Christianisme Social were active before and during the

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<sup>4</sup>Denis Goulet. A New Moral Order: Studies in Development Ethics and Liberation Theology. New York: Orbis Books, 1974, pp. 84-85.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-85.



May 1968 revolt. These groups, like others of their kind in Europe and Latin America, have been highly critical of modern capitalist society and its economic and psychological oppression of ordinary people and its tendency to exploit the Third World.<sup>6</sup> In the mid and late 1960s, other radical groups arose in France, particularly influenced by the ideas and actions of the European New Left. Playing a key role in the May 1968 revolt, these groups, Men's Catholic Action, a parish-based workingmen's organization, and Young Christian Students, a university group, are characterized by their New Left emphasis on participatory democracy, a union of workers and students, and their intense opposition to the alienating conditions of a hierarchical, bureaucratized, modern capitalist social order.<sup>7</sup>

In the United States, the Berrigan brothers and others have offered severe criticism of many of the conditions of modern times, including the Viet Nam war and military spending, poverty, and racism. Their disruptive, but non-violent, behavior, including draft card burning, organized draft resistance, and the destruction of Selective Service records, has often landed them in jail. Another Christian activist is Father James Groppi, a Roman Catholic priest who has organized the racial minorities of Milwaukee's ghetto and has led rent strikes and other legal actions against local economic interests and civil authorities. In other American communities,

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<sup>6</sup>Francois Houtart and Andre Rousseau. The Church and Revolution. New York: Orbis Books, 1971, Ch. 8.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

similar activities have been carried out by concerned ministers, priests, and lay persons.

In Europe, Christian and Marxist intellectuals were discovering that the age-old hostility between the two systems of thought could be transcended by a dialogue which explored the common elements of the philosophies.<sup>8</sup> Marxists were overjoyed that Christian theology and everyday social and political concerns were moving in a direction critical of prevailing arrangements, while Christians were buoyed by recent neo-Marxist rejections of the classical Leninist conception of the vanguard state (at least in some Western European quarters), as well as the infusion into Marxist thought of a brand of humanism contained in the early writings of Marx. By sitting down and discussing such topics as history, alienation, community, human nature, transcendence, and faith and belief, representatives of these highly divergent traditions found that, without eliminating all tensions and differences, significant common ground for communication and action could be established.

Meanwhile, Catholic and Protestant theologians were slowly developing a new, politicized approach to a highly conservative area of endeavor. Traditional ideas of theology and biblical scholarship were being challenged in the light of the new currents of social concern and political thought and

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<sup>8</sup>Roger Geraudy. From Anathema to Dialogue. New York: Herder and Herder, 1966. Translated by Luke O'Neill.

action. Theologies of hope, development, liberation, revolution, and violence abounded in an atmosphere where it was felt that a formalized structure of religious thought could undergird and perhaps lend legitimacy to Christian participation in a modern age of revolution.

Briefly then, we have sketched the radical Christian movement of the 1960s and 70s (although activity seems to have subsided somewhat in the last few years, just as the activities of the secular New Left have submerged from public view during the same period). It has been made up of concerned Christian clerics and lay persons engaged in varying degrees of resistance and revolutionary activity aimed at changing social and political structures deemed oppressive, unjust, and un-Christian. While Latin America has been the center of this activity, resistance has also sprung up in Western Europe and the United States. Supporting these activists are numerous theologians and other Christian intellectuals who more or less agree with the analyses of the activists. The analyses of these activists and theologians can be essentially boiled down to a rejection of the capitalist political economy and its attendant effects on the people of the developed West and the Third World. Later sections of this work will closely examine the views of the radical Christians and various proposals for changing the world they find themselves in.

The contemporary world from the viewpoint of radical Christians. "To be a Christian, one must be critical of America."<sup>9</sup> Perhaps nowhere else in the literature of the contemporary radical Christian movement will one find a statement which so aptly sums up the group's basic views. For America, its economic system, its public policy, its sheer power and willingness to use that power, and its way of life, is central to an understanding of all that is wrong with the modern world and what is in desperate need of change. With only slight differences, the Western European capitalist nations are perceived in the same light. This section will set out the social and political world view of those contemporary Christians who find political arrangements in the modern age so repugnant, though in their writings, one will rarely find anything approaching a systematic presentation satisfying to one immersed in a social science tradition.

Without ever discussing the subtleties of the pluralism vs. power elite debate which has taken place within the social sciences during the last several decades, Christian radicals seem to have fully accepted one side of that debate. To them, American life in the last few generations has steadily taken on the forms of a centralized, systemic structure in which corporate power has expanded into the political and cultural realms of national life for the purpose of augmenting

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<sup>9</sup>Michael Novak. A Theology for Radical Politics. New York: Herder and Herder, 1969, p. 29.



and defending an economic class-based inequality.<sup>10</sup> The formal institutions and associations of the political process: legislatures and executive branches at the local, state, and especially at the national level, the two major political parties, and even conceptions of law promulgated by what are nominally independent judiciaries, all have been effectively controlled or coopted by an increasingly powerful private sector which is concerned with protecting its conception of societal organization and interests. Even the labor movement, which once voiced criticism against the entrenched power of financial-industrial hegemony, has, in recent times, learned to cooperate with a system which has been unusually successful at spreading its largesse for purposes of social stability.

In the capitalist nations of Western Europe, a similar process has taken place in the post-World War II era, where once-radical socialist, social-democratic, and labor movement-based political parties and related trade union movements have entered into a cooperative arrangement with private corporate power and national governments dedicated to social planning along the lines laid down by the dominant private sector. In both Western Europe and the United States, the educational process and the media (or the value-consensus, if you will) are, for the most part, strongly influenced by private

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 63-70. See also Arthur G. Gish. The New Left and Christian Radicalism. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970, Section 1. Rosemary R. Ruether. The Radical Kingdom. New York: Harper and Row, 1970, Ch. 15.



corporate power and easily reflect the values of the dominant social classes which control the commanding heights of the economies. Hence, ideas which challenge the position and interests of these dominant classes have a difficult time being disseminated to large segments of the populations of these affluent societies.

In America, this modern form of society has been described as the triumph of Corporate Liberalism, an increasingly rationalized arrangement in which government and its welfare policies joins with the corporate sector to provide a floor for the quality of life of those who cannot adequately compete in the economic process.<sup>11</sup> In marked contrast to the preceding era of laissez faire capitalism, with its accompanying class hostility, Corporate Liberalism institutionalizes a political economy in which the potential for social conflict on the traditional Marxian model is severely reduced, while other aspects of the government's public policy rationalize the corporate investment and production picture, for purposes of long-range predictability, stability, and profitability. All of this, of course, presupposes the uninterrupted cooperation of large-scale public and private associations increasingly characterized by their bigness and authoritarian styles of management and direction.

Thus, unlike earlier periods of American history, the individual finds himself confronted by a social landscape

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<sup>11</sup>Michael Novak, *ibid.*, p. 25, pp. 63-70.

occupied by authoritarian institutions which seek to leave him out of the decision-making process of the operations which intimately affect his life. In the work place, labor unions, themselves hierarchical and run by full-time professionals, for the most part leave the field of decision-making to corporate management, so that tasks become routinized and standardized. In the formal political process, participation for the vast majority of the population consists entirely of voting for candidates picked by party officials and wealth corporate supporters. Since the two major political parties differ very little in their basic philosophies and public policy positions, even voter participation has remained at a comparatively low level (at least in the U.S.), an indication of widespread apathy and alienation.

Another aspect of the age of Corporate Liberalism, according to some radical Christians, is the effective control over the cultural process enjoyed by the dominant classes of modern capitalist societies.<sup>12</sup> Because of their control of the media and the educational process, public opinion is fashioned in such a way as to prevent the widespread acceptance of socialist and other beliefs critical of ongoing arrangements. In the place of informed critical thought

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid. See also Rosemary R. Ruether. The Radical Kingdom, *ibid.*, Ch. 15. Both of these authors rely heavily on the analysis provided by Herbert Marcuse. One Dimensional Man, *ibid.*

arise self-serving political and cultural myths designed to justify the system's essential structure and orientation. Most media present modern capitalist society as basically humanistic, progressive, and definitely on the right track in terms of policies designed to serve the interests of all of its citizens. These societies are said to be open to peaceful change and must be seen as the best possible balance between participation and criticism, and the need for orderly management. Thus, these societies are the pinnacle of working democracy and social and economic development, and serve as guides for the future development of all other societies.

The foundation of these controlled belief systems is a social philosophy based on a technological pragmatism and the ideological suppression of alternative transcendent values.<sup>13</sup> By adopting a non-cognitivist epistemology which stresses "value-free" inquiry in social and political matters, the modern capitalist system effectively creates a false dualism between description and normative assessment, between "what is" and "what ought to be." Thus, all alternative values (such as socialism) which might serve as a guide for changing society's institutional and policy structure, are automatically ruled out, and criticism effectively silenced. What the modern defenders of the status quo don't understand, say some radical Christians, who have addressed themselves to the problem, is that normative assessment is implicit

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<sup>13</sup>Michael Novak, *ibid.*, pp. 19-21, p. 47, pp. 55-58.

contained in any theory which seeks to separate out values not contained or reflected in the contemporary reality being described.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the field is saved for those values imbedded in present day social arrangements (such as elitist conceptions of society, a Hobbesian view of human nature which supports a capitalist social and economic order, a theory of psychology which stresses extrinsic rather than intrinsic rewards, etc.).

Besides the poverty of cultural and intellectual life in the modern capitalist society, many radical Christians also focus on the poverty and "inauthentic" quality of individual life styles. Individual competition, an excessive materialism, and the fetishism of extrinsic rewards (material objects and status, as opposed to intrinsic rewards such as internal pride and satisfaction, or a satisfaction at having accomplished a task for the good of the community) seem to animate the contemporary American or Western European. This privatized, mechanistic existence is seen as logically flowing from a capitalist cultural tradition influenced by Hobbesian and Utilitarian ideas, which emphasize the atomic, isolated individual, rather than the individual in a community context.<sup>15</sup> The secular New Left is applauded by radical

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-21, 55-58. For a non-theological view making the same argument, see William E. Connolly. The Terms of Political Discourse. Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Co., 1974.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.



Christians for its rejection of this cultural style, and its embracing of an egalitarian, participatory, and communal style of individual self-realization.<sup>16</sup>

Radical Christians who pay attention to the domestic ills of American society make much of the fact that racism, both overt and institutionalized, is an endemic condition, as is the poverty that afflicts a substantial minority of citizens, both black and white. Besides condemning this situation and pointing out that with the nation's moral heritage and technological expertise, the situation is potentially capable of being corrected, there is little systematic analysis of why these conditions exist. By perusing radical Christian literature, one will find little, if any, of the standard analyses employed by more traditional left-wing spokesmen, who usually will point out the system's need for a reserve army of the poor to act as a downward pressure on wages, or the need on the part of the ruling class for a cultural mythology which creates antagonisms between different racial and ethnic elements of the oppressed classes. Aside from the obvious observation that racism has always existed and is wrong, and that poverty could easily be eliminated by a dynamic economy, radical Christians provide scant theoretical linkages between these phenomena and the overall structure and orientation of the society.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid. Also Rosemary R. Ruether. The Radical Kingdom and Liberation Theology, *ibid.*, and Arthur G. Gish. The New Left and Christian Radicalism, *ibid.*



If radical Christians lack a systematic analysis of racism and poverty in the United States, the same cannot be said of their views toward American foreign policy, and the relationship between government international policy and the needs of the domestic capitalist order (with some minor variations, the same analysis would apply to the European capitalist nations).<sup>17</sup> America is seen as the dominant partner of a group of Western, developed, capitalist nations, whose foreign policy activities and influence over the world trade system creates an international order in which the Third World finds itself in a state of permanent subordination.

According to this radical Christian analysis, a modern capitalist economy has certain objective needs which together demand a certain stance towards the less developed areas of the world. Among these needs are outlets for surplus capital invested by multi-national corporations, markets for the products exported by the developed areas, cheap labor, and raw materials produced by Third World areas and imported by the developed economies. These needs taken together make it imperative that political conditions in Third World nations be receptive to the outlook and desires of Western capitalism. For example, if a particular underdeveloped nation were to be

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<sup>17</sup>See, for example, Michael Novak, *ibid.*, p. 23. See also John Gerassi (ed.). Revolutionary Priest: Complete Writings and Messages of Camilo Torres. New York: Vintage, 1971. Throughout this book, we are presented with Torres' views on American imperialism and its relationship with the domestic social and political processes of various Latin American nations.

controlled by a government hostile to Western capitalism, the prices of raw materials might be raised to such an extent that economic conditions in the developed areas would be negatively affected. The same would hold true if capital and export markets were to be closed. One could imagine the results if large parts of an entire region, such as Latin America, or much of the Third World, were to break out of the orbit of Western capitalism.

For these reasons, the Western nations, particularly the United States, go to great lengths to guarantee a receptive political atmosphere in most areas of the Third World. Not only must socialist governments friendly to the Communist powers be prevented from gaining control of these nations, so also must governments sincerely interested in genuine independence from the fetters of the U.S.-dominated international trade system and political order. For with this independence, a nation could restrict foreign capital and import penetration, and at the same time raise the prices of primary products, such as oil, rubber, copper, tungsten, bauxite, and food products. These actions would provide the foundation for an independent, and, eventually, a dynamic, indigenous process of development. Looking back to the other end of the international trade relationship, if large or crucial areas of the Third World, for whatever reasons, closed off, or reduced, the capital export and manufacturing export markets of the First World, severe

economic dislocations would result in the developed capitalist West, including, eventually, a crisis of overproduction.

Thus, according to the views of radical Christians, the power of the American foreign policy establishment in all its manifestations, must be exercised in order to maintain capitalism's hegemony over the Third World. Overt and covert means must be employed to maintain governments and political factions friendly to American economic and political interests.<sup>18</sup> When the everyday operations of the State Department, the Agency for International Development, and the U.S.-dominated Export-Import Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank all fail, then the C.I.A. covertly tries to effect results. Ultimately, American interests will be defended by overt military means.

This latter method is how some radical Christians explain the war in Indo-China. Far from being a series of blunders or foreign policy miscalculations, the war was to them an example of the inherent logic of American policy vis-a-vis the Third World.<sup>19</sup> American military intervention was a last-ditch attempt to shore up the stability of the U.S.-dominated world system, and to stop the self-determination of the area's people. A restatement of the Domino Theory would be in order

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<sup>18</sup>No serious critic would claim that economic domination alone motivates the American (or European) corporate-government elites. Geo-political strategic considerations vis-a-vis the Communist nations also figure in the capitalist nation's concerns.

<sup>19</sup>Michael Novak, *ibid.*, p. 23.

here: the danger would not be falling dominos in a contiguous geographical sense, i.e.: first South Viet Nam, then Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, etc. Rather, a victory by a national liberation movement in Southeast Asia would serve as a morale boost for similar movements in other regions dominated by the capitalist West, as, for example, in Latin America or Africa.

When Christian radicals look at the domestic politics and conditions of Third World nations, particularly Latin America (where most of the movement's writers devote their attention), the effects of U.S. (and European) imperialism are brought out in sharp relief. It is in this situation that American political and economic power interacts with domestic social arrangements and political actors to create an overall environment that the Christian revolutionary advocates wish to change drastically.

For centuries, Latin America has been a region where entrenched oligarchies of landowners have presided over static, hierarchical societies in which the subordinate classes barely eked out a living on tiny plots of their own (minifundia) or on large plantations and estates (latifundia) geared towards export agriculture. Later, as the bases of these domestic economies were transformed by the beginnings of modernization, landowners increasingly shared power with commercial, financial, and industrial interests absorbed into the historically evolving ruling classes. Social mobility



has been virtually non-existent in a situation where the ruling classes have employed the state apparatus (especially the military and the police) and the Church to protect their interests and way of life. Domestic politics has consisted of power clashes and coups d'etat (and occasionally elections) between elements of the elites and newer emerging groups (industrial and finance capital, a small white-collar middle class) who, upon entering the ruling sector of society, have agreed to play by the traditional rules. Traditional rules essentially mean never displacing or eliminating older, established interests: thus, one reason why these societies have never undergone significant structural change, even on the dynamic capitalist pattern of North America or Western Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Given the prevailing social structures and accompanying social values, economic growth and change would have been severely restricted had it not been for the penetration of the region by first European, then American, capitalist interests, and the merging of the Latin American economies with the growing world trade system in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Foodstuffs (Brazilian and Colombian coffee, Argentine wheat and beef, Central American and Caribbean fruits and sugar, etc.) grown on the latifundia of the ruling

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<sup>20</sup>Howard Wiarda. Elites in Crises: The Decline of the Old Order and the Fragmentation of the New in Latin America; The Corporative Model of Political Change. Essay written and presented at the Merhson Center for Education in National Security, Ohio State University, 1967.



classes were expanded beyond the level of local consumption and became destined for the growing markets of Europe and North America, while capitalist interests of the Northern Hemisphere developed Bolivian tin mines, Venezuelan oil, Chilean copper, and other primary products essential to modern industrial economies. Infrastructure needs, such as roads, ports, bridges, railroads, and communications linking the primary-producing areas to the sea, and beyond, to the markets of the developed world, were provided by northern capital investment, or through loans to local governments, which became increasingly indebted to U.S. and European financial interests.

Undergirding all of this was a growing network of mutual interests, relating local elites to the governments and private sectors of the advanced capitalist nations.<sup>21</sup> North Americans and Europeans were preoccupied with creating social and political conditions which would maximize access to primary products at the lowest possible costs while at the same time guaranteeing the most favorable climates for the marketing of manufactured products, the repatriation of profits from capital investments, and the collection of interest and principal from loan activities. Local elites were interested in maximum enrichment from cooperation with developed capital

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<sup>21</sup>Mauricio Lopez, "The Political Dynamics of Latin American Society Today," in Harvey Cox (ed.). The Church Amid Revolution, *ibid.*, pp. 129-150. Also, John Gerassi (ed.). Revolutionary Priest: Complete Writings and Messages of Camilo Torres, *ibid.*

(since they saw no incentive in the risky process of indigenous development and modernization with its delayed consumption and attendant social and political restructuring) as well as protection from the occasional threats to their social domination.

This latter concern entailed occasional overt intervention on the part of the more developed nations of the northern hemisphere, but usually involved less militaristic forms of assistance, especially in the twentieth century. In recent decades, the United States has practically developed these relationships into a science, with military and police assistance programs, foreign aid for projects designed to lessen political tensions or to buy off various political actors and groups, and C.I.A. penetration of local political processes.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the mutually rewarding exchange has been maintained, protected against indigenous assaults on the local status quo. Dissident groups, in recent times Marxist-oriented urban and rural guerrilla movements, many inspired by Communist Cuba, are suppressed directly by U.S.-trained and supplied military and police units, while "dangerously" reformist governments are overthrown by C.I.A.-supported and sponsored coups: Brazil's Goulart administration in 1964,

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<sup>22</sup>For a critical discussion of the modern forms of U.S. influence over the domestic political processes of the Latin American nations, see Philip Agee. Inside the Company: CIA Diary. New York: Stonehill, 1975. Also Jerome Levinson and Juan de Onis. The Alliance That Lost Its Way. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970.

Chile's Allende, Guatemala's Arbenz, the Dominican Republic's Bosch, and several others.

The result of local elite domination and collusion with foreign capital has been a severe imbalance of economic development aggravated by the crisis conditions of the mid- and late twentieth century. Chronic underdevelopment accompanied by poverty among the masses of the population is the condition of many areas of modern Latin America, and radical Christians place the blame squarely on the doorstep of the local ruling classes and their supporters in the advanced capitalist nations.<sup>23</sup> In the view of these radical Christians, it is a condition which could be alleviated by radically different social policies--policies which the dominant classes are either unable or unwilling to carry out. Hence, overthrow of these classes, by violence if necessary, has become the order of the day for these religious critics of the prevailing socio-political system.

The severe imbalance of economic development has resulted because of the peculiar patterns of foreign economic investment and the relationship Latin America has with the rest of the international trade system. The exploitation of primary products

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<sup>23</sup>Mauricio Lopez, *ibid.* See also Helder Camara. Church and Colonialism: The Betrayal of the Third World. New York: Dimension Books, 1969, pp. 101-111; Helder Camara. Spiral of Violence. London: Sheed and Ward, 1971, Ch. 1; "Latin America: Lands of Violence," a statement by a working committee of the Latin American Episcopate and signed by 920 radical Roman Catholic priests, which appears in John Gerassi (ed.). Revolutionary Priest: Complete Writings and Messages of Camilo Torres, *ibid.*, pp. 442-446.

(as the foundation of these national economies) has meant that only certain enclaves have undergone significant transformation, while the rest of the societies have stagnated in centuries-old patterns of economic activity (barely of a subsistence nature and sometimes not even at that level). Thus, a few port cities and commercial centers and latifundia (or copper, tin, oil areas, etc.) have prospered while the rest of the populations remain, at best, marginal, or else totally outside the modern sectors of social and economic processes. Furthermore, chronic indebtedness on the part of Latin American governments to foreign financial interests, corrupt and inefficient taxation systems, and the more or less permanent reliance on imports of manufactured goods from developed nations, have all contributed to the seemingly permanent underdeveloped condition of the region, in which capital formation for the purpose of widespread economic change cannot be realized.<sup>24</sup> In addition, ruling elites

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<sup>24</sup>The reliance of Latin American economies on First World manufactured imports has been especially stressed as a barrier to economic development by Raul Prebisch. Toward a Dynamic Development Policy for Latin America. United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, 1963. See also Charles W. Anderson. Politics and Economic Change in Latin America. Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1967; and Jerome Levinson and Juan de Onis, *ibid.*, Ch. 2. The Prebisch Thesis maintains, primarily, that the terms of trade between the developed capitalist nations and Latin America (and the rest of the Third World, for that matter) have, for the most part, tilted to the advantage of the First World. Prices for manufactured imports keep rising vis-a-vis the prices of the Third World's primary products, producing a chronic imbalance of trade and payments. Thus, to remain in that relationship means, all other things being equal, that the Third World will not bring the cash reserves necessary to support an indigenous



perceptively fear the results of significant economic development and modernization, which would at least entail enlarged internal markets for domestically produced industrial goods and services, a significant redistribution of income to support those expanded internal markets, and the concomitant acquisition of power by the new social groups and changed conditions created by modernization, i.e.: middle class bureaucrats, technocrats, skilled workers, and a generally better-educated population.

The imbalanced development has been aggravated by the world's most severe population growth rate, and, as a result, large percentages of the region's people experience intense poverty and restricted life chances. Illiteracy and malnutrition are endemic for those on the margin of national life, or completely outside the processes of the mainstream of these dual societies. Indians and mestizos who cannot sustain themselves on tiny, barren plots of land, or who have been displaced by modern methods on the latifundia or foreign-owned lands, are driven by necessity to urban areas, where they live in favelas, or ghettos of the poor. Here they are often unable to be absorbed in the economic processes of the

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process of modernization and economic diversification. Permanent indebtedness to foreign capital and U.S.-dominated international lending agencies, as well as a disinclination to create a local base of industry and modern services, will remain the rule. Radical Christians and others critical of relationships between the First and Third Worlds usually point to this factor as one of the key methods whereby the developed capitalist nations keep the Third World in a position of permanent underdevelopment.



most modern sectors of the Latin American nations. As one can see, the situation is ripe for all sorts of political and social instability, and it is this condition which secular and religious radicals have both condemned and exploited as the base of a politics of insurgency and structural change.

The literature of the radical Christian movement, whether written by Latin Americans, Europeans, or North Americans, rarely goes into much detail as to the policies of post-revolutionary regimes. But it is obvious that as a precondition for social change based on their socialist values, certain policy directions would have to be pursued as soon as political power was seized. Economic relationships with the developed capitalist nations would have to be abandoned, *a la* Cuba, or else drastically altered, i.e.: full nationalization or shared ownership and management of foreign-owned enterprises, increased taxes, strict limits on repatriated profits, severe reductions on imported manufactured goods, as well as other actions which would allow independent capital formation and reinvestment into local enterprises.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, major agrarian reform would have to be undertaken.

Perhaps more importantly, some or all of the political relationships with Western, developed capitalist nations would have to be curtailed. This would involve cutting off all

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<sup>25</sup>Some non-socialist, progressive governments, such as Venezuela, Mexico, and the military government of Peru, have already moved quite a way in this direction. These policies were also pursued by the now-defunct Allende regime.

avenues through which the U.S. foreign policy establishment especially, and U.S. and European corporate entities, exercise power within these societies. No longer would U.S. military and police-intelligence assistance programs, foreign aid activities, or C.I.A. operations be conducted on their previous foundations (if at all), nor would private sector relationships with former ruling elite representatives be tolerated. All of this, of course, involves domestic political and social realignments on a major scale.

Clearly, the political and social power of the former ruling classes would have to be destroyed (if not also the literal existence of the individuals making up these classes). Power in these societies would have to gravitate to the masses of the people, either through institutions which emphasized maximum participation, or political formations which reflected Leninist principles of vanguard leadership. Tremendous redistribution of income and wealth would have to accompany this process. In short, the rebuilding of society along the lines envisioned by radical Christians would certainly be disruptive, protracted, and almost surely bloody.

What differentiates radical Christians (and secular radicals) from moderate progressives like Venezuela's ex-president Betancourt is not so much the desire for significant change, but the belief that change can only come about by a complete rejection of all previous social forms. Moderates in Latin America have hoped that through continued ties with First World

political and economic power (albeit transformed by reforms enacted in the home countries), sustained economic development could be accomplished, and, slowly but surely, the marginal populations could be absorbed by growing national economic pies. The Alliance for Progress, with its upgraded foreign aid programs, its increased foreign investment, and its domestic reform programs in areas such as taxation, economic planning, governmental administration, agrarian reform, and housing and education projects, hoped to accomplish just that. And, predictably, moderates like Betancourt's Accion Democratic party, and the region's Christian Democrats, flocked to its banner.

Radicals, on the other hand, saw little change under the programs, and instead pointed out the stepped-up "law and order" emphasis of U.S. foreign policy, with its expanded C.I.A., military, and police-intelligence assistance operations. The hoped-for reforms, in their view, never panned out, and poverty and official inertia remained the order of the day. If anything, the oppressive social orders had only moved in the direction of greater repressive strength, supplied by their generous northern neighbor, whose real motives were not hard to ascertain. Coups in Brazil and the Dominican Republic, and later, armed intervention in that latter country, only reinforced earlier notions. Thus, without wanting simply to trade one foreign dependency for another, as Cuba had done, radicals in the 1960s realized

that the politics of moderation was not the best course to follow. Social and political relationships in their societies would have to be overhauled root and branch, regional and hemispheric consequences be damned.

Although some might think that Latin America is somewhat unique in its relationship to the developed capitalist powers, the Christian radicals studied in this work feel that the entire Third World exists in a similarly oppressed condition. Asia, Africa, and Latin America all find themselves in the same situation vis-a-vis the First World, locked into world trade patterns dominated by the interests and needs of the powerful capitalist nations and condemned (unless political action is taken) to permanent underdevelopment and poverty. The same methods employed by the U.S. and Western Europe against the self-determination of Latin American peoples are used against all Third World peoples, including, as in the case of Viet Nam, massive armed intervention. Political machinations, military and police assistance, and foreign aid manipulation are no strangers to Africans and Asians.

As sixteen Third World bishops have described the situation:

"The peoples of the Third World are the proletariat of existing humanity, exploited by the great, their very survival threatened by ones who, because they are stronger, arrogate to themselves the sole right to judge and police peoples less rich in material terms.... Within even the developed countries there are classes, races,



and peoples that have not yet received their rights to a full human life. An irresistible urge is working these poorer elements towards their betterment by liberating them from all oppressive forces."<sup>26</sup>

This statement, brief and stylistically polemical though it is, aptly sums up the perceptions of those radical Christians who responded to the dynamic currents of critical political thought and action in the 1960s and 70s.

Visions of future societies. After having examined the fundamental political and social views of the Christian New Left, we can begin to perceive their visions of the future just society. By analyzing their writings and exercising the creative imagination, we can, to some extent, at least, begin to understand how their values would be translated into public policy. Only after this is done, can one begin to understand how radically altered present arrangements would become at the hands of these critics.

Public ownership of at least the commanding heights of developed and less developed economies would be a prerequisite in the process of dislodging former ruling classes from their positions of social power and their ability to direct society. Whether this socialist economy would be owned and controlled by an accountable and accessible government or by the workers themselves, or some mix of the two, is never

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<sup>26</sup>"Gospel and Revolution," a statement authored by sixteen bishops of the Third World, in Martin E. Marty and Dean Peermen. New Theology #6. London: Macmillan, 1969, p. 244.



clearly discussed in the writings of radical Christians. At any rate, only a socialist foundation of the economic process could realize the condition of abundance, distributive justice, and qualitative development which is obstructed by class-stratified societies where inequality is deliberately maintained by the overall public policy process for the benefit of a few.

Socialism, however, can take many forms, and each of these forms, including the Leninist vanguard state and its Stalinist variant, claims to be the embodiment of the "genuine" concept of democracy. In their writings, modern radical Christians clearly reject any form of administered socialism, which in their view must show a disturbingly striking similarity to Soviet-style socialism and the authoritarian forms of modern capitalism. Thus, a strong libertarian emphasis, expressed in the idea of participatory democracy, animates the political visions of the Christian New Left (as well as their more secular brethren).

Michael Novak, in rejecting a socialism managed by a small cadre of experts who implicitly understand the true interests of all in society, as well as possessing a monopoly of comprehension of the society's future needs and directions, sees participatory democracy as a political system which "requires that every person's voice be heard in matters which affect that person and the community as a whole."<sup>27</sup> By

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<sup>27</sup>Michael Novak, *ibid.*, p. 44.

denying the claims of the hierarchical, bureaucratic forms of socialism, the Christian New Left reveals its affinity to the same views which characterize the secular New Left, especially the peculiar, and rarely-stated notion of freedom. "Negatively stated, (this conception of freedom) is opposition to authoritarianism, paternalism, manipulation, and institutionalism.... Freedom means that people have the right to participate in making the decisions that affect their lives."<sup>28</sup>

Rosemary Ruether explains the concept of participatory democracy further while presenting a glimpse of what this system might look like:

"This libertarian, grass roots tradition of socialism was briefly revived in the French May Revolution of 1968 which especially pitted itself against the Leninist, party-dominated socialism of the Communists, as well as the hierarchical bureaucratism of the unions. Local control, participatory democracy in every sphere of activity, common ownership of the means of production by the workers themselves, without a mediating 'party,' abolition of all hierarchies, either dictatorial or 'representational,' and the shaping of technological processes to personalized functioning and purposes; these are the hallmarks of radical socialism. In this sense radical socialism rejects the social organization of so-called 'capitalist' America and so-called 'Communist' Russia equally. Both have sold out man to machinery."<sup>29</sup>

Ruether is typical of Christian New Left writers who see the need for the fashioning of radically different institutions in politics, culture, and the workplace which would facilitate participatory decision-making on a mass scale. Furthermore,

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<sup>29</sup>Rosemary R. Ruether. Liberation Theology, *ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

if participatory democracy is to have any real meaning at all, a social ethic of pluralistic tolerance would also have to be embodied in the new form of social organization. Without tolerance for the clashing of opposed views, the participatory democracy would quickly degenerate into a tyranny of the majority, thus losing its most important reason for being, namely, the development of the personal capabilities of all citizens.

Not only would social relationships of power within societies be drastically changed in the radical Christian future, so too would the relationships between nations, particularly the nations of the First and Third Worlds. A new international order would be created, the sole purpose of which would be the rapid development of the less affluent nations to the level of abundance enjoyed by the nations of Western Europe and North America. Trade arrangements, capital movement, and foreign assistance projects (money, material), and human skills) would change to reflect the new emphasis, as would the termination of military and intelligence activities on the part of those nations formerly developed and capitalist.

In all societies founded on the principles of the Christian New Left, relationships between persons would be so altered as to suggest the development of a radically new social being, or, as some socialists have always contended, the creation of a new man. Patterns of behavior hitherto witnessed, and molded by social structures and institutions

reflecting the ethics of earlier inegalitarian forms of societal organization, would be slowly abandoned in favor of relationships expressing love, equality, and respect for the person as a person. In the egalitarian, participatory communities described above, the individual would develop inner potentialities which, up to now, have been thwarted by relationships of domination and the debilitating effects of a social, political, and economic division of labor and function which accompanies systems of hierarchical domination. It is this hierarchical division of function characteristic of earlier forms of society which closes off life chances and means of expression, and so retards the full development of most individuals. Henceforth, people would be viewed as ends, not means, and would be valued and loved for their being, not their function.<sup>30</sup>

Bernhard Haring has described the effects of inegalitarian ethics and forms of organization and what an alternative to these would be like:

"the greatest liberating power is that of love: love in its fullness as social and interpersonal relationships, love growing in its articulation with justice, wisdom, valor, and temperance. Man imprisoned in his own ego remains underdeveloped, a slave to narrowness and pettiness. The human person finds himself only in encounter with the Thou, in genuine human relationships respecting and fostering the freedom of all. Love itself is threatened by the desire to dominate the other person. Love and freedom are

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<sup>30</sup>Michael Novak, *ibid.*, p. 44



possible only in mutual respect, in mutual giving and receiving on all human levels."<sup>31</sup>

Without mutual love and respect between individuals, domination and the resulting restriction of life chances will continue to characterize interpersonal relationships. The removal of institutions which embody inequality and restrictive life chances will allow the flowering of a new social ethic which emphasizes those positive qualities of human nature which, up to now, have only been partially realized. An interplay would be established between the new political and economic institutions of the participatory democracy, and the new social ethic, each reinforcing the other, as all institutional and ethical structures have reinforced each other throughout history. Thus, we can begin to understand how radical would be the leap from our present form of society to that future society envisioned by radical Christians, from the institutions and reflecting ethics of the present, to those dear to the hearts of the activists and theologians of the contemporary Christian Left.

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<sup>31</sup>Bernhard Haring. A Theology of Protest. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970, p. 39.



## C H A P T E R   I V

THE MOVEMENT II:   RESPONSES TO THE POLITICAL  
POWER OF ESTABLISHED ELITES:

To a considerable degree, various elements of the Christian New Left hold rather similar views on the nature of modern political arrangements and the shape of that temporal justice to be arrived at after a period of struggle with those currently holding power. These viewpoints have been described and analyzed in preceding sections. However, when discussion moves to the subject of political strategies for change, significant differences of opinion arise. In the first section of this work, we saw how the Christian tradition has imposed a strong inhibition against active resistance to established political authority as well as disobedience of authority's commands. Certainly many progressive Christians are still influenced by this tradition, and we shall later see examples of this attitude.

Among Christians who find present conditions so appalling, there are some, however, who appear willing to go beyond this tradition and are ready to engage in action which would fundamentally alter society. The differences which do exist center around the problem of violence when it is employed for indisputably good ends. These latter Christians are manifestly aware of the fact that revolutionary political change strongly contains the potential for violent behavior, perhaps on a mind-boggling scale. They are also aware of their own

religion's strong tendency to condemn outright the violence that arises from intrasocietal conflict. As a result, the literature of modern Christian radicals has dwelt at some length on the problem of violence and violent resistance.

As we have noted earlier, established Christianity has been consistent in its broad condemnation of private violence. It is for this reason that both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas had to construct elaborate defenses for the Christian citizen's participation in military activities on behalf of his ruler. By the same token, Luther and others had to defend the right of the ruler (and his Christian agents) to engage in occasional activities which today fall under the general heading of the police powers of the state.

After these collective exceptions to the stricture against violent behavior were fashioned by various church fathers, the Christian churches continued to focus on violence in the age-old ways. The concept of violence was still defined along the lines of common language usage: behavior on the part of individuals or groups (now unauthorized individuals or groups, that is, whoever the churches considered to be without authority) which brought about death or injury (physiological, but psychological forms could be considered as well) to another person or persons. With the rise of capitalist relations, property also qualified as an object of violence.

This definition of violence, stressing private, unauthorized acts, remains the most commonly accepted one for most individuals, Christian and non-Christian alike. For modern Christian radicals, the above definition is correct as far as it goes, but remains insufficient to explain all of the interpersonal relationships in a society of unequal class power. It is to this broadened conception of violence that we now turn.

Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language: College Edition defines violence in the following manner:

- Physical force used so as to injury or damage; roughness in action;
- A use of force so as to injure or damage; rough injurious act;
- Unjust use of force or power, as in deprivation of rights.<sup>1</sup>

As we can see, this definition closely corresponds to the common language definition provided above. The concept of violence in both these instances refers to behavior which leads to death, injury (physical or psychological), or damage. Furthermore, this behavior is seen as both unauthorized

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<sup>1</sup>Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language: College Edition. New York: World Publishing Co., 1962. See also Sidney Hook, "Violence" in The Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences Vol. 15, New York: Macmillan Co., 1934. Edited by Edwin R. Seligman. In this essay, Hook asserts that in a social context violence is the illegal employment of methods of physical coercion for personal or group aims, thus moving the discussion away from actions carried out by government (whose actions might be referred to as "authorized force"). Violence must be unauthorized (that is not in accord with the legal-moral foundations of a society), overt and intentional.

and overt. Overtness here means that the behavior leading to death, injury, or damage carried out by human agents is a physical act and could conceivably be observed by anyone, and that anyone would conclude that the behavior was indeed causing death, injury, or damage. This leads to the final element of the concept: violence usually (but not necessarily always) implies intentionality on the part of those who carry it out. Those who engage in violent behavior usually intend that it results in death, injury, or damage, and for a reason.

Let us provide an example of the above definition: we would not judge a political system violent if we observed its military or police establishment engaged in activity which led to the death or injury of certain persons, groups, or classes, or to a condition of intimidation in which those persons, groups, or classes failed to engage in activity because of the knowledge that their behavior would be met by direct injury at the hands of the authorities. The reason we would not judge the behavior of the military or police violent is because, as Sidney Hook observed earlier, it is authorized by the internal consistency of the society's ethical-legal system to prevent or repress disorder, at least so long as it uses no more force than is thought necessary by broad elements of public opinion.

The difficulty here, however, is that a society's ethical-legal system at any given moment reflects power relations within that society which themselves express the



ideological and normative assessments of those already in power, or who identify with the existing order. For instance, the terrorization and occasional torture of dissidents by Soviet police will hardly be considered violence in terms of the internal legal logic of the nation's political system. This does not mean that outside observers, including many Marxists, would not consider this behavior violence. The judgement of whether behavior is violence or not violence turns on many factors, authorization by legally constituted governments probably being the least of them. The concept of violence, in its political and social sense, is implicitly related to a hierarchy of moral assessments. At the top of that hierarchy would be an assessment of the fundamental principles, ideologies, and form of political and economic organization of a society. This leads us to a discussion of the radical Christian notion of violence.

Where the radical Christians diverge from the definitions of violence presented above are the elements of overt-ness and intentionality (as ordinarily understood). Robert McAfee Brown, in his Religion and Violence, perceives four types of violence, the fourth of which exemplifies the contribution of the new Christian Left; violence can be:

1. An individual's overt physical act of force or destruction;
2. Institutionalized, overt physical acts of force or destruction, as in war or police action (here corresponding to authorized acts, as discussed above);



3. Personal and covert, that is, an individual's violation of another's personhood (psychological manipulation);
4. Institutionalized and covert - where social structures, legal and political institutions, and public policy expressed in legislation, persistently over time violates the personhood of some members of society, i.e.: social stratification and exploitation and its results - poverty, hunger, the lack of full development of human potentiality (restricted life chances), the depersonalization and objectification of individuals lower on the social ladder, etc.<sup>2</sup>

Since Brown's fourth type of violence is not an overt, physical act, nor is it intentional (not usually, anyway, or at least not easily proven as intentional), the ordinary language - dictionary definition of violence would not seem to apply. Yet, what unites all elements of the radical Christian movement is their belief that this, indeed, is violence. When the laws of a society protect and enforce an overall social structure which exploits some individuals and effectively keeps them in a condition of oppression and deprivation, a situation of violence is said to exist. Brown approvingly quotes St. Thomas Aquinas, who said: "unjust laws are acts of violence rather than laws."<sup>3</sup> Modern Christian radicals refer to this type of violence as "institutionalized violence," a rather poor choice of terms, since what they mean could

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<sup>2</sup>Robert McAfee Brown. Religion and Violence. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973.

<sup>3</sup>Dino Bigongiari (ed.). The Political Ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas. New York: Hafner, 1969, p. 72.

easily be confused with the overt, intentional, institutionalized activity of armies and police forces. Henceforth, in this work, when we refer to "institutionalized violence," we will be referring to the broad conception of the new Christian Left as presented in Brown's fourth type of violence.

Thomas Merton clarifies the radical Christian conception of violence when he states: "the problem of violence is...the problem of a whole social structure which is outwardly ordered and respectable and inwardly ridden by psychopathic obsessions and delusions."<sup>4</sup> Merton decries outmoded notions of violence which focus attention on the individual or group committing overt acts:

"When a system can, without resort to overt force, compel people to live in conditions of abjection, helplessness, wretchedness that keeps them on the level of beasts rather than of men, it is plainly violent... Supposedly peaceful laws, which maintain this spurious kind of order, are in fact, instruments of violence and oppression."<sup>5</sup>

According to Merton, to understand violence in the modern world, we must focus on law and public policy and its effects, as well as on acts of overt force.

The authors of "A Theological Understanding of Revolution," a report of the Study Group for Theological Questions presented by the Advisory Committee to the Christian Peace

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas Merton. Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice. Notre Dame, Inc.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-8.

Conference at Sofia, in October, 1966, see status quo violence taking several forms, including the occasional use of overt police and military force by the legal authorities. More often though, this violence takes the form of a division of wealth and property which deprives many individuals of life's basic needs, the manipulation of social custom and tradition which reinforces lower class people's belief that conditions cannot change, and the use of political power in many forms.<sup>6</sup> This use of political power includes control over the media and education, and the employment of the governmental process (legislative, judicial, and executive) to reinforce and maintain a system of exploitation and deprivation.

Helder Camara, the radical Brazilian archbishop, sees several distinct types of violence which exist in a dialectical relationship to one another. Although we will examine this reactive process in some detail later, for our present purposes we will focus only on Camara's Violence #1. Violence One is "established violence," a systematic injustice produced by hierarchical social structures and the many-faceted public policy process which maintains this type of society.<sup>7</sup> Camara sees this violence resulting from the egoism of privileged ruling classes, and manifesting itself in

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<sup>6</sup>"The Just Revolution," in Cross Currents, vol. 18, no.1, Winter, 1967, pp. 67-70.

<sup>7</sup>Helder Camara. Spiral of Violence, London: Sheed and Ward, 1971, Ch. 1.

the sub-human conditions of most Third World people and some minorities in the developed West (American racial minorities). Laws and administrative enforcement which, intended or otherwise, result in social conditions of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, lack of chances for the development of full personhood, in short, conditions of near-slavery for many people, are clearly examples of "institutionalized violence."

The nine hundred and twenty priests who signed the statement "Latin America: Lands of Violence," appear to attribute some degree of intentionality to the violence of the region's ruling classes:

"For centuries Latin America has been a region of violence. We are talking of the violence that a privileged minority has been using to exploit the vast majority of the people. We are talking of the violence of hunger, of underdevelopment... We call this violence because it is not the fatal and inevitable consequence of a technically insoluble problem but the unjust result of a situation voluntarily maintained."<sup>8</sup>

Once again, a view of violence as a phenomenon imbedded in the ongoing reality of inegalitarian societies. This violence is not an intended physical act of overt force, but the unintended consequences of a class-stratified society which maintains itself by legislative and administrative action designed to protect property relations, a maldistribution of wealth and economic and political power, and perhaps most important of all, the propagation of a respect for law and social order.

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<sup>8</sup>"Latin America: Lands of Violence," in John Gerassi (ed.). Revolutionary Priest: Complete Writings and Messages of Camilo Torres. New York: Vintage, 1971, pp. 442-446.



This notion of "institutional violence" thus serves as the basis for a justification of overt acts of force carried out by those who would seek to change that status quo. For if the other side is engaged in "institutional" or structural violence, then one can perceive one's attempts to overthrow these institutions by violence as a form of self-defense, rather than unprovoked aggression.

The debate within the movement. Camilo Torres did not always hold the view that armed action against the state was a proper method of political change. A son of the Colombian ruling class, Torres, for many years, believed that evolutionary change, through the electoral process, would bring political reform and economic growth and development, eventually changing the lives of all citizens of this country for the better. Before his ordination, Torres received a law degree, and after entering the priesthood, studied sociology and political science at Louvain, Belgium. Returning to Colombia in 1959, he was named chaplain of the National University of Bogota, and there taught sociology until his suspension by his bishop, in 1962, for supporting a student strike.

Torres then served as Dean of the Institute of Social Administration, a section of the School of Public Administration. Here he became personally acquainted with many national leaders from the fields of government and politics, industry, agriculture, banking, and the military. It was here that his



political views began slowly to become more radical, as he perceived these national leaders as obstacles to social development, men whose views were decidedly in favor of restricting the kinds of reforms Torres felt were obligatory if the masses were ever to become elevated from their squalid condition. His first actions to upset the nation's leaders were to become deeply involved with agrarian reform, setting up mobile instruction units to teach peasants verbal and reading skills and to acquaint them with the political and economic aspects of their situation.

Soon Torres was meeting anti-establishment political activists of all stripes, and became convinced that only a united front of all these progressive elements--students, concerned intellectuals and technocrats, Communists, Socialists, urban industrial and service workers, local peasant associations, and political independents, could bring about comprehensive social and political change. By the end of 1964, his non-sectarian organizing activities began to draw the wrath of both church and government officials, and during the next year, Torres became increasingly disillusioned about working through established legal channels. In late 1965, he asked to be suspended from his priestly vows. He then dropped out of sight, to join an underground rural guerrilla unit engaged in violent activity against the government and wealthy landowners. On February 15, 1966, Camilo Torres was killed during a fire-fight with units of the Colombian army.

Torres gravitated from a stance of non-violence to a commitment to radical revolutionary violent action because of his belief that all legal avenues for political change had been effectively blocked by the Colombian ruling class in alliance with American foreign policy interests. The ruling class, in his view, controlled the media and the Liberal-Conservative political party monopoly (thus local, regional, and national legislatures, administrations, and the national judiciary), as well as the church hierarchy. Behind the scenes, the military and a political police worked hand-in-hand with the C.I.A. and U.S. military assistance project officers who trained Colombians specifically for anti-progressive action. Faced with such a monolith of conservative power, Torres came to feel that violent revolution was the only means left to fight a social system which perpetrated "institutional violence" against the masses while hiding behind the facade of democracy. Furthermore, he argued, responsibility for all violence, overt and institutional, fell squarely on the shoulders of the families of the ruling class, and their middle class supporters.

Torres believed that no real change of social and political structures was possible without concerted pressure from the dispossessed masses. Thus, the chances of a peaceful revolution were directly dependent on the foresight of the ruling class and their American supporters in meeting this pressure. If the elite insisted on refusing change, then overt violence

on the part of the revolutionaries would be in order. This violence, predictably, would be met with official overt violence spurring greater violence on the part of the masses (clearly justified, in Torres' view).<sup>9</sup> Torres claimed to prefer the non-violent road to change, but his analysis of the situation, and his personal knowledge of the thought processes of members of the ruling class led him to conclude that violent change was more or less inevitable.

How did Torres reconcile violence with his Christian values and upbringing? In an address to a conference at Grancolombiana University in June, 1965, he stated:

"The economic, military, ecclesiastical, and political powers will wage war with the people in the face of the revolution which is approaching, a revolution which consists of a change of structures. This change implies violence for those who retain power. But violence is not excluded from the Christian ethic, because if Christianity is concerned with eliminating the serious evils which we suffer and with saving us from the continuous violence in which we live without possible solution, the ethic is to be violent once and for all in order to destroy the violence which the economic minorities exercise against the people."<sup>10</sup>

Echoing Torres' espousal of violent revolution, the signers of "Latin America: Lands of Violence" have stated:

"Because the privileged minorities resort to full repression to stop the process of liberation, many

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<sup>9</sup>John Gerassi (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 284. See also Torres' "Message to Christians," in IDO-C Staff (eds.), When All Else Fails: Christian Arguments on Violent Revolution. Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1970, pp. 159, 162. Also Francois Houtart and Andre Rousseau. The Church and Revolution. New York: Orbis Books, 1971, pp. 190-196.

<sup>10</sup>John Gerassi (ed.), *ibid.*, p. 27.

people see no other solution than the use of force by the people...we cannot condemn an oppressed people when it finds itself obliged to use force to liberate itself... These facts and reflections lead us confidently to ask the following of our pastors:

1. ...Avoid equating or confusing the unjust violence of the oppressors with the just violence of the oppressed who find themselves obliged to have recourse to force in order to obtain their liberation.
2. That they should denounce with absolute clarity...the violence of the powerful...(and) proclaim the right of the people to legitimate defense...and grant these Christians an ample margin of liberty in the choice of the means they consider most suitable for obtaining this liberation and constructing this society... We do not seek to constitute ourselves as standard bearers of an indiscriminate violence... but rather of giving a new dimension to the repeatedly recognized principle that an unjustly oppressed community has the right to react, and even react violently, against an unjust aggressor."<sup>11</sup>

In a letter sent to Pope Paul VI on the eve of his 1968 trip to Bogota, the Conferecacion Latinoamericana Sindical Cristiana, in the name of its five million members, stated the views of elements of the labor movement thusly:

"There is a profound and rich humanistic tradition in our continent that rejects violence. But, Brother Paul....do you think the rich and powerful who today manage Latin America as a personal fief will surrender their positions, their privileges, by virtue of a peaceful process, by moral and spiritual conviction? Experience has taught us that little or nothing can be hoped for from possible conversions of the rich and the powerful...you should know that the violence of those who want to make a humanist revolution will not exist except in relation to the resistance of

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 442-446.



those who are opposed to the request of the Latin American peoples, who simply ask to regain their dignity."<sup>12</sup>

Bertrand Duclos continues the plea for a Christian understanding of the violence in which the masses must partake for their liberation:

"The love that illumines the eyes of anyone who has chosen the Lord reveals to him that the violence of the poor is a violence that is necessary. He knows very well that the poor are the first and worst sufferers from violence because the order of the powerful never hesitates to augment its violence when the 'little ones' lift their heads...All ways of human expression have been closed to them, every dialogue refused...Nothing remains to them other than organized refusal, the deliberate will to die rather than continue living in slow motion...to die in refusal, in revolt, seems like the first gesture of the rebirth of oppressed man."<sup>13</sup>

Unlike those authors above, who have made up their minds, George Celestin has attempted to provide a balanced picture of Christian participation in violent revolution. As he sees it, "not every revolution is necessarily good; it may be oppression in a different form. God is not always on the side of the revolutionaries."<sup>14</sup> At the same time, however, to

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<sup>12</sup>"A Letter from Latin American Workers to Paul VI," in IDO-C Staff (eds.). When All Else Fails, *ibid.*, pp. 192-198.

<sup>13</sup>Bertrand Duclos, "Let My People Go," in IDO-C Staff (eds.). When All Else Fails, *ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

<sup>14</sup>George Celestin, "A Christian Looks at Revolution," in Martin E. Marty and Dean Peerman. New Theology #6. London: Macmillan, 1969, p. 102.



propound an extreme pacifism is to support a false "spiritualism":

"Violent use of power usually accompanies any revolution. Thus, to write off any such use of power as evil, closes the case for revolution and ends all discussion. Appreciation of power as a basic good, which can be perverted but need not be, is fundamental."<sup>15</sup>

Hence, any consistent pacifism would necessarily prevent activity aimed at stopping various forms of tyranny. What it does is close the door on any discussion of possibly necessary options for remedial action against a status quo that might conceivably be manifesting either overt or institutional violence.

Some writers justify the use of overt revolutionary violence only after certain conditions have been met, since violent resistance contains unlimited potential for abuse and perversion of one's basic aims. The authors of "The Just Revolution" see force as being justified only after the following situation obtains:

- It is presumed that the oppressors already manifest either overt or institutional violence, or both, against the people;
- All means of lawful criticism and action have been completely used up, to no avail. Furthermore, non-violent resistance, in the form of strikes, occupations, etc., have been used, also to no avail;
- It must be decided that the suffering caused to all parties by a violent revolution would

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

not be greater than the overt and institutional violence of the status quo.<sup>16</sup>

The authors warn that revolutionary violence must never be idealized or mythologized. Those who engage in it are morally obligated to awareness that the revolutionary process can lead either to a new tyranny, or depraved behavior animated by hatred and revenge or both. In this situation, the humane purposes of the revolution will be lost, as undesirable elements take over the leadership of society. Since the revolutionaries are Christians, they must never forget that the oppressors are also human beings in the eyes of God, and that the duration of the withholding of their civil rights must be as brief as possible.<sup>17</sup>

Bernhard Haring completely shares the views of the authors of "The Just Revolution." Admitting that violence might be called for in some situations, he fears that the revolutionaries might become infected with the spirit of violence.<sup>18</sup> Haring much prefers non-violent resistance, seeing it as a sign of strength rather than cowardly weakness, as some have

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<sup>16</sup>"The Just Revolution" in Cross Currents, *ibid.*, pp. 67-70. In establishing conditions which must be met before revolutionary violence can be justified, the authors were consciously drawing an analogy between modern political conditions and the "Just War" argument of Thomas Aquinas. Like Aquinas, they feel that the use of force must rest on a moral foundation.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>Bernhard Haring. A Theology of Protest. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970, pp. 15, 21-22.

seen it. To him Martin Luther King and Gandhi prove the wisdom and humanity of this tactic.

Thomas Merton shared Haring's views that under certain circumstances overt violence against oppressors might be necessary when all else failed.<sup>19</sup> Much more preferable, however, was a Christian-inspired non-violent resistance, as a more humane and reasonable method of political conflict resolution, directed against the institutionalized violence of the powerful. In Merton's scheme of things, a non-violent victory stood a better chance of creating a more humane and just post-revolutionary society, since violent means could carry over and contaminate the new order, driving the authorities into a spasm of tyrannical vengeful action. Christian nonviolent resistance respects the oppressor as a moral agent and human being--he must be persuaded to stop what he has been doing because it is wrong. The Christian nonviolent revolutionary is helping him to become a better human being, not beating him or winning a narrow, selfish partisan victory.

In Religion and Violence, Robert McAfee Brown warns that violence easily corrupts those who employ it, and a presumption against its use must always be uppermost in the minds of activists. However, in some situations, violent revolution is justified:

- Violent revolution must be resorted to only as a last gesture, only after legal channels and non-violent forms of resistance have been exhausted;

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Merton. Faith and Violence: Christian Teaching and Christian Practice. Ibid., pp. 8-13.

- the revolution must have the right intention: the correction of grave social abuses;
- in the course of the revolution, no indiscriminate violence must be carried out - the violence must be discriminate and used only in well thought-out situations. As much moderation must be used as the political situation allows;
- post-revolutionary government power must not be used for revenge, thus degenerating into a new system of exploitation;
- the revolution must have a reasonable chance of success. No suicidal exercises for the purpose of providing future symbols can ever be tolerated.<sup>20</sup>

For various reasons, other modern Christians who are critical of political and social arrangements reject overt violence, at least for themselves, as a viable method of change. Some see violence as categorically wrong, while others perceive the strong tendency for revolutionary violence to provoke greater official violence, sending the entire situation spinning off into undifferentiated savagry.

Pope Paul VI could hardly be described as a modern Christian revolutionary. Yet, in his writings and speeches, the pontiff has condemned outright many of the features of modern politics. In a speech at Bogota in 1968, the Pope pointed out serious injustices in many Third World nations, as well as a maldistribution of wealth between developed capitalist nations and lesser developed areas.<sup>21</sup> Using strong language

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<sup>20</sup>Robert McAfee Brown. Religion and Violence. Ibid., pp. 78-88.

<sup>21</sup>Francois Houtart and Andre Rousseau. The Church and Revolution, ibid., pp. 215-217.



in admonishing the developed nations and the ruling classes and governments of Latin America, Paul declared that the spirit of Christian love, justice, and brotherhood should be addressed to the problem, and eventually we would see corrective action and improvement. Calling for the implementation of world planning and cooperation, the Pope demanded that rich nations place a significant part of their national resources (that amount previously spent on armaments and weapons technology) at the service of the developmental aspirations of the poorer nations.

Paul then categorically rejected violence as a means of bringing about a more just society. Violence is "contrary to the Christian spirit. Violence is not evangelical, it is not Christian."<sup>22</sup> Anti-establishment violence will result in civil and religious decadence and lead inevitably to dictatorship. As we have seen earlier, in Populorum Progressio, the pontiff declared that certain severe situations might justify armed resistance against the state. But the "institutional violence" of Third World societies, particularly in Latin America (and the Pope agreed that, indeed, this was a form of violence), was the lesser of two evils, and had to be tolerated, or at least challenged through legal or non-violent methods.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 215-217. Also Populorum Progressio, Numbers 30-31, in IDO-C Staff (eds.). When All Else Fails, *ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

In an earlier section, we discussed Helder Camara's Violence #1 as an example of the new Christian Left's conception of institutionalized violence. By looking at his Violence #2 and Violence #3, we can begin to understand Camara's notion of a "spiral of violence" and his extreme reluctance to employ violence as a method of social change.<sup>24</sup> The institutionalized violence of social conditions maintained by ruling classes is met by armed resistance on the part of the masses (Violence #2). This, in turn, is met by an even greater degree of overt violence and oppression on the part of the authorities (Violence #3), well established in Camara's own Brazil by the mid and late 1960s. The archbishop fully comprehended the ultimate results of the spiral from Violence 1 to 3, when the Latin American ruling classes, with full U. S. military, diplomatic, and economic assistance, decided to crush, once and for all, any threats to their interests.<sup>25</sup>

Camara's solution to the problem of resistance was an open, well-organized, world-wide, non-violent moral witness against, and condemnation of, social injustice.<sup>26</sup> Realizing that only radical change in the First World could guarantee change in the Third, he hoped to bring pressure on the

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<sup>24</sup>Helder Camara. Spiral of Violence, *ibid.*, Ch. 1.

<sup>25</sup>Denis Goulet. A New Moral Order: Studies in Development Ethics and Liberation Theology. New York: Orbis Books, 1974, pp. 91-92.

<sup>26</sup>Helder Camara. Spiral of Violence, *ibid.*, Chs. 2 and 3.

governments and policies of developed nations as well as those of Latin America and other lesser developed areas. Camara proposed an international, non-sectarian movement to be known as Action for Justice and Peace, which would employ moral pressure, nonviolent methods (demonstrations, occupations, strikes, boycotts, refusal to pay taxes and submit to conscription, etc.), and the collection of hard social data confirming social injustice in all nations.<sup>27</sup> The movement would seek, ultimately, to radically change political, economic, and cultural institutions in the First and Third Worlds, for First World nations to integrate their underdeveloped minorities, and for the First World to drastically revise its international trade and aid policies vis-a-vis the Third World.

Richard Shaull's ideas closely parallel those of Helder Camara, as he has a hard time accepting the bloody consequences of violent revolution in the Third World, even if the attempt proved successful. Christian responsibility demands support for radical change in both the U. S. and the Third World, but the method of change should be nonviolent.<sup>28</sup> Individual Christians and church groups in Latin America must make themselves the catalyst for change by organizing and supporting a new broad-based opposition of peasants, workers,

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., Ch. 3.

<sup>28</sup>Richard Shaull, "A Theological Perspective on Human Liberation," in IDO-C Staff (eds.). When All Else Fails, ibid., Ch. 3.

intellectuals, and students, who will confront the present reality of domination. In the U. S., supporters of radical change must prepare themselves for a long, hard struggle, by raising the consciousness of others against the reality of corporate power, racism, and neo-colonialism. A new base of radical political power must be established in both areas, or else violence will someday be the only option.

In Colombia, after the death of Camilo Torres, a revolutionary group of Christians was formed, including one bishop, at least fifty priests, and well over one hundred lay persons.<sup>29</sup> Called the Golconda Group, after the farm at which the organization was formed, these radicals, who pride themselves in having a solid Marxist foundation for their theory and activity, have pursued the united front tactics abandoned earlier by Torres. They have attempted to set up working alliances with any and all who would oppose the Colombian ruling class system of inequality and its U. S. supporters.

Golconda has rejected violence for itself, at least for the time being, but doesn't attempt to preach this view to others who might feel that nonviolent means have been exhausted in the struggle.<sup>30</sup> Instead, these radical Christians have opted for a process of intense organization of the urban

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<sup>29</sup>Rick Edwards, "Religion in the Revolution?... A Look at Golconda" in the North American Congress on Latin America Newsletter, vol. 3, no. 10, February, 1970, pp. 1-10.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 9.



working class, living among the poor in the barrios and hoping to raise the consciousness of these very religious people to an awareness of their plight and the possibilities of transcending the situation.

Golconda has led people's takeovers of the nation's major universities and has tried to form alliances and dialogues between concerned students and faculty and the ordinary people of the barrios. In addition, the group has had some success at organizing massive abstentions from the electoral process, teaching that the legal channels are a sham, a rigged agreement between the upper class leaders of the Liberal and Conservative parties who make up the National Front government. For these efforts, the group has been the target of repression from both church and state. The government has arrested, beaten, and tortured its members, several eventually being exiled.<sup>31</sup> The church hierarchy has used the media to vilify Golconda members, while suspending some from their priestly functions, and transferring others out of barrio parishes.<sup>32</sup>

The German Lutheran Helmut Gollwitzer also warns against using violence rashly in the revolutionary process.<sup>33</sup> He admits that some extreme situations might call for some sort of violent response, and he can respect those who would employ

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6

<sup>33</sup>Helmut Gollwitzer. The Rich Christians and Poor Lazarus. New York: Macmillan, 1970, pp. 59-65.

armed resistance, but warns that the tendency is great that violence can get out of hand. Instead, Gollwitzer urges the Christian churches to play a greater political role, bringing pressure on the governments of the developed capitalist nations for certain reforms of policy, especially that policy which affects the Third World. Concrete demands could include:

- a significant increase in the annual percentage of Gross National Product devoted to development aid;
- agreements stabilizing the prices of Third World primary products as well as preferential access for Third World industrial products in developed nations' markets;
- the acceptance of U.N. developmental guidelines;
- multilateral disarmament;
- an end to bilateral aid loans with high interest (or any interest) and short repayment schedules;
- an end to "tied" aid, that is, assistance with conditions attached which either aid the private sectors of the developed nations or else oblige the lendee to follow the diplomatic, political, and military policies of the lender;
- an end to the brain drain from the Third World;
- an increase in advisors, educators, and technically skilled people sent to the Third World.<sup>34</sup>

In the U. S., the Berrigan brothers have become famous for their espousal of nonviolent methods for radical political change. Daniel Berrigan has warned that the increasingly violent posture of some American radicals, such as the

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-20.

Weathermen, is probably due to the ingrained violence which goes to the core of national values, and expresses itself institutionally in the form of racism, poverty, militarism, and neo-colonialism.<sup>35</sup> This stance on the part of radicals is dangerous, and already has triggered further violent repressive action from the Johnson and Nixon administrations. A "spiral of violence" could easily result. Nonviolent resistance is the only approach which is morally justified and tactically sensible.

Perhaps the best way to summarize the debate over the use of violence that has animated the contemporary radical Christian movement, is by examining a recent World Council of Churches study on the problem.<sup>36</sup> The authors of "Violence, Nonviolence, and the Struggle for Social Justice" have attempted to pull together the various positions on the matter, and to clarify the issue of revolutionary methods by asking the hard questions that had been, up to 1973, avoided, or at least not been articulated to any degree.

By way of introduction, the WCC Central Committee's sub-unit on Church and Society has recognized that God has established earthly government, and granted it the legitimate function of restraining private power and avarice for

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<sup>35</sup>Daniel Berrigan and Robert Cole. The Geography of Faith. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971, Ch. 2.

<sup>36</sup>"Violence, Nonviolence, and the Struggle for Social Justice," a statement commended by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, August, 1973, for study, comment, and action. In The Ecumenical Review. Vol. 25,

the common good, utilizing force for this purpose if necessary. All too often, however, earthly government exceeds this mandate, and begins to uphold an unequal system of burdens and benefits within which, the majority of the citizenry suffers.<sup>37</sup> It is correct to describe this kind of system as "violence," because "violence has many faces. It is not merely a matter of physical harm intentionally inflicted upon an individual in an obvious, dramatic way... violence is built into many of the world's existing social, political, and economic structures."<sup>38</sup> In this situation, the masses tolerate this condition until it becomes unbearable, at which time they begin the process of resistance. The problem with resistance, however, is its almost inexorable tendency towards violence. And although the goal of resistance is the creation of a just and stable peace, the violent forms of resistance can degenerate into a dehumanizing bloodbath, far removed from Christian ideals of interpersonal relationships. It is precisely this dilemma which faces the Christian radical, and which forced the sub-unit on Church and Society to spend two years studying the problem and drawing up the following observations and questions.

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No. 4, October, 1973. This author relies on an offprint copy of the statement obtained from the Fellowship of Reconciliation.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-15.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 5.



The study group which has authored the WCC report recognizes three more or less distinct positions among Christian radical advocates of resistance.<sup>39</sup> The first subscribes to nonviolent action as the only approach believed to be consistent with Christian morality, since Christ himself never resorted to violence in the moment of his tribulation. This position, though admitting the difficulties associated with nonviolence and the probable lack of success in many situations of confrontation with established power, simply rejects violence as dehumanizing and, in principle, immoral.

A second position regretfully accepts the necessity of violence, and sees it as a Christian duty, but places severe restrictions on its use. According to this approach, criteria resembling the "just war" restrictions must be applied to its use: all other options used up to no avail, a situation of serious oppression, a reasonable chance of success, etc.<sup>40</sup> This is the position of Brown and the authors of the "Just Revolution," mentioned earlier.

A third approach, already engaged in violence, tends to reject nonviolence as an unrealistic objective, a pulling back from the battle being waged. The advocates of this position feel that violence will simply continue until the just order has been established, and the problem for them appears to be humanizing the situation as far as that can be achieved, to avoid an undifferentiated carnage.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-16

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

The WCC study group has admitted that up to now it has been unable to find any ground on which these three approaches can come together to agree. But the authors then advance some ideas of their own, in hopes of creating some common understanding for all Christian radicals who face the moral dilemma of violence in the revolutionary struggle. First of all, certain forms of violence are simply off limits to Christians. These include torture (of any type), the holding of innocent hostages, and the deliberate or indiscriminate killing of innocent noncombatants. These actions simply dissolve the moral distinctions between the oppressors and the revolutionaries.

Secondly, the Church and Christian radicals have paid insufficient attention to forms of nonviolent resistance as a method of social change. This approach offers a wide array of options and tactics which don't foreclose, as violence usually does, a positive relationship with the oppressor once the revolution has been successfully consummated. The contemporary ecumenical Christian reform effort should seriously and strenuously explore these possible options.

Finally, a potentially dangerous attitude has crept into Christian radical thinking in recent times, and relates to the second point just mentioned. Many radicals have developed the idea that non-violence is an unrealistic "anti-political" stance that can never achieve any semblance of "real" social justice, that it is a turning away from the hard reality of

revolutionary confrontation, necessarily violent. The authors of the WCC study point out that nonviolence can be used by itself, or in combination with violent tactics, and that to perceive the situation in either-or terms is to close off from consideration very viable and humanistic options.

Most importantly, the authors of "Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social Justice" pose a series of questions designed to bring about deeper thinking on the part of those Christian radicals who have contemplated resistance, regardless of its form.<sup>41</sup> It appears to be the hope of the study group that as individuals and groups think about their own answers to the questions relative to their peculiar political situation, a clearer understanding of the problem of violence, and its moral consequences, will develop for the participants in the struggle.

For those who have come to the conclusion that violence is not only justified, but necessary, the study group would recommend thinking about the following points:

- Have the possibilities for nonviolent actions in the particular situation been fully explored, or have the participants simply assumed in advance that they won't work, or are unrealistic?
- Is the choice of violent tactics alienating mass opinion more than it is attracting support, thereby undermining the resistance effort in its entirety?

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18.

- In practical terms, are the violent means being studied so as to prevent their possible development into an insensitive anti-humanistic attitude? Are the participants becoming blase about the taking of human life?
- Have efforts been made to at least anticipate the integration of the former oppressing classes into the future just society? Or will revenge become the post-revolutionary motif?

For those who advocate nonviolence as a firm moral stance, the authors would have them think about the following:

- Have the pacifistic participants failed to appreciate the depth and the consequences on human life of the institutionalized violence in their society? Have they failed to understand the possible social upheaval necessary to uproot it?
- Might nonviolent resistance emasculate the necessary efforts required to uproot the present system at a key moment in the struggle?
- By standing fast to the principle of non-violence, might the participants be giving the means priority over the final purpose (an end to oppression)?
- Might the participants be placing their own conscience and perceptions of self-worth ahead of the needs of the exploited classes?

Finally, for all of those engaged in resistance, the following questions must be answered:

- What are the anticipated goals of the struggle? What kind of society is to be established? And are the benefits of the struggle for this better society worth the costs to be incurred?
- How is the power of the revolutionary movement to be made accountable once the new system is



established? Will one elitist and exploitive system simply be exchanged for another?

- How will the exploiting class be treated once the revolution is over? Will the members be made a functioning part of the new society, or will they be targeted for special, negative treatment? For if they are not accorded treatment based on their essential humanity, then something very basic has been lost in the "grand" historical process.

## CHAPTER V

## THE MOVEMENT III: THE NEW POLITICAL THEOLOGY:

"...the most obvious characteristic of political theology is that it is biased. For most of its history theology has been biased towards the political right: nor was this challenged. Political theology is biased towards the left... But there is more to it than a simple choosing of political allegiance. In the gospels Jesus is biased towards the left: he takes his place with those who are certainly not the king's men. He associates with the poor and despised rather than with the rich and influential...He takes sides apparently because God has taken sides... God is biased in favor of the poor and the meek: the rich and the powerful - no matter what the church has taught - have no part in God's Kingdom. Political theology is biased because Jesus was biased."<sup>1</sup>

This statement exemplifies the radical Christian movement's views towards what has, up to now, been (with the rare exception of a few politicized and left-leaning religious groups of the past, such as the American Social Gospel tradition of the early twentieth century) a traditionally conservative area of endeavor: the writing of theology. Notions of God and God's relationship to man and history have invariably been linked with the political and social assumptions of the individuals who fashion studies of those subjects.

Prior to the modern period, Christian theology alternated between two ontological perspectives, both of which are alien to an active revolutionary viewpoint which conceives of man taking positive action to reshape his worldly existence. These

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<sup>1</sup>Alistair Kee (ed.). A Reader in Political Theology. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974, p. xi.

These two perspectives, coexisting with some degree of tension, retain, to this day, a great deal of influence in the mainstream of Christian thinking. Their impact, say many modern-day Christian radicals (see below), explains why many religious individuals remain wedded to a contemporary status quo, rather than engaging in critical confrontation with present political and social institutions.

The first perspective predates Christianity, yet influenced the new religion as it became established in the Western world. This ontological orientation has been referred to as the ontocratic society.<sup>2</sup> It is a social belief system, an underlying metaphysics (called "sacral" by some Christian radicals), which conceives of an essential unity linking empirical reality (nature, history, and man's relation to both), and the cosmic. In this overall scheme, the divine entity (or entities) ordains all human activity, events, and social and historical configurations. The divine order has total power over man and nature, thus, human activity fulfills within the temporal order purposes already given to that order by the creator. What may change, in this viewpoint, are human attitudes, or consciousness; these are indeed, in some measure, the product of human will. But the underlying realities are not subject to human action. Thus, scientific, technological, and ideological change takes place very slowly, if at all.

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<sup>2</sup>Joseph Petulla. Christian Political Theology. New York: Orbis books, 1972, pp. 8-10. See also Arend van Leeuben. Christianity in World History. New York: Scribner, 1966.

Eastern philosophic systems typify the ontocratic pattern, while a cultural posture opposed to such a view would be Western Positivism, with its attendant belief that nature and society can be shaped by the wishes and actions of men and women.

In the ontocratic society, political institutions and social order tend very strongly to take on a fixed character. Whatever is, has been willed by the divine being(s), therefore human will should not strive to reorder the present state of affairs. In ontocratic systems, rulership and religious belief and practice may become fused in a single person or institution.<sup>3</sup>

Although St. Thomas Aquinas was not totally resistant to socio-political change, nor to the idea that the ruler can be challenged when he deviates from community law, his conception of politics takes on many of the characteristics of the ontocratic pattern. Aquinas perceived a hierarchy of law regulating empirical historical reality, with the source of this controlling order residing in the divine will of the Supreme Being. Thus, political institutions, far from being a necessary evil, as Augustine argued, are a positive good in themselves, a unified reflection of both man's simultaneous sociability and his need for order. This characteristic of governing institutions (and of human nature in society) in turn reflects the purpose of the Creator in history. In

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<sup>3</sup>Joseph Petulla. Christian Political Theology. Ibid., p. 8.



other words, the regularities of the worldly realm, like those of the cosmic realm, are established by the extra-worldly creating phenomenon, God.

If governing institutions take on such importance for human life, as they do in the Thomistic system, it should not be surprising that individuals are warned about the serious consequences of challenging rulership. Rulers project the community life and are a natural part of the unifying and spontaneous forces of community existence. Although they may deviate from their duty and impose irrational burdens on the community, and even be challenged and removed, the process of removal must itself express the traditional and understood social bonds of the community. And we may properly endure tyranny if less objectionable means for its removal are not available.

Because of the direct link between divine will and earthly affairs, continuity of governing institutions becomes the focus of Thomistic thought. When continuity becomes elevated to such importance, resistance to oppressive institutions recedes as a viable option for human affairs, for resistance implies a temporary rupture of the social bonds. Only if resistance is carried out by a legitimate agent of the community, can moral obligation be maintained. Any other type of resistance, said Aquinas, would be irresponsible, and a dangerous tinkering with the order of human life ordained by God.

The second ontological perspective in the Christian mainstream, represented by the writing of St. Augustine and Martin Luther, perceives a sharp distinction between earthly affairs and the nature of the Supreme Being.<sup>4</sup> Existence is radically distinguished between a City of God (or Realm of Grace) and a City of Man (or Realm of Power), the former representing the love and perfection of the Creator, the latter the locus of sinful, fallen man. The goodness of God resides not in earthly social and political institutions or in collective human behavior, but in the hearts of individual men and women who have adopted the teachings of God and who have faith in salvation. In contrast to the ontocratic conception, which perceives of God immanently in existing social orders (as in Aquinas' belief that social relationships represented a positive rational force and reflected the will of God on earth), Augustine (and later Luther) perceived God in individual souls, in the midst of a dark, hostile world.

The difference in perspective is crucial, for the Augustinian view conceives of earthly institutions in an essentially utilitarian framework, absent of any inherent good, only providing some semblance of an apparent or positive order within which each person must alone arrive at the supreme truth of life in Christ. The relationship between God and individual man becomes primary, while all earthly

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10.

relationships take on a derivative importance. One effect of this Augustinian viewpoint is to make political activity for the most part, superfluous, since perfection or improvement in the City of Man is quite impossible. The best we can hope for is some imperfect historical stability within which each of us can find God. Thus, an other-worldly spiritualism becomes the focus of human life, a poor environment for the flourishing of ideas claiming a better future for the oppressed here on earth.

In summary then, the Augustinian and Thomistic ontologies, though differing radically in their view of earthly institutions, nevertheless point in somewhat the same direction: toward obedience of earthly authority's commands and away from resistance. Augustine's negative view of worldly structures made what the modern world calls "politics" almost unnecessary, turning the Christian individuals' attention away from worldly affairs and towards a one-to-one relationship with God. Furthermore, his admonition to obey secular authority only strengthened the conservative political implications of his overall theology.

Aquinas' view (that human collective life can represent a positive good ordained by God) has tended to strongly augment those institutions of government which might be resisted by those claiming a violation of community law. Aquinas' allowance of a right of resistance was so restrictive as to make effective rebellion almost impossible. This has

to be the case with an ontology stressing the existence of divine rationality as imbedded in traditional human institutions and social affairs. If the wisdom of the Creator is manifested in social life, those regulating mechanisms we call government, so central to earthly life, take on great importance. This ontocratic union of divine rationality and institutionalized human life, has produced a strong bias towards authority in those cultures influenced by the Thomistic ontology. It is not surprising then, that contemporary Christian radicals have found a need to revise those established interpretations of Christian theology, while exploring new avenues of religious thought which correspond to, and support, their own visions of the political order. This chapter will sketch some of the dominant theological contributions of present-day radical Christians who believe that an explicit merging of the traditions of "God study" and modern left-wing political analysis and action is now in order.

In her writings, the Roman Catholic, New Left Theologian, Rosemary Ruether, has criticized traditional Christian conceptions of theology and their implications for social theory and political action. According to Ruether, Christian religious thought has been characterized by a set of falsifying and distorting dualisms brought into the mainstream of thinking by the Platonic influence of St. Augustine and other early Church fathers.<sup>5</sup> This dualistic model of epistemological,

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<sup>5</sup>Rosemary R. Ruether. Liberation Theology. New York: Paulist Press, 1972, Ch. 1



ontological, and ethical perceptions has not only molded formal religious thought, but also the broader development of Western philosophy, with effects felt to this day. Fundamental, unbridgeable gaps were created between certain concepts such as: the sacral vs. the secular, individual vs. community, spiritual vs. material, soul vs. body, the transcendent vs. the empirical, church vs. society, "to come" vs. "now," the City of God vs. the City of Man.

Christianity has traditionally stressed the spiritual, transcendent sides of these dualisms, with predictable consequences. Religious thought and experience became individualistic, other-worldly, and privatized.<sup>6</sup> People related to God on a one-to-one basis, seeking salvation in a world to come. Obviously, this tended to downplay the importance of worldly conditions and of the possibilities of collective action aimed at correcting temporal oppression and abuses. When the dominant motif was a mystical notion of redemption and religious experience based on a spiritual individualism, any conception of communalistic political action for the purpose of changing earthly conditions was bound to suffer. A Christianity which stressed a "God up there," a grand "cosmis plan," and a world to come after death, was implicitly warning that religion and politics don't mix.<sup>7</sup> This philosophy neatly dovetailed with the oppressive, hierarchial societies of the late

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

Roman period, feudalism, and, she adds, capitalism.

Later, the scientific societies of the post-Enlightenment period would stress the other sides of the dualisms, and again, human consciousness and conditions of life would suffer. For now, an intensely empirical motif would deny the "possible" and the "desirable" for what is, here and now. Echoing Michael Novak's denunciation of the fact-value dichotomy discussed earlier, Ruether sees the one-sided philosophic foundation of modern society again supporting the status quo, much as traditional Christianity did earlier.

In her view, the crisis of modern religion (and society and politics) is due to the crumbling of these neat dichotomies.<sup>8</sup> Traditional religion and religious experience is being crushed beneath the weight of an excessive empiricism, while secular social philosophic experience suffers from a dearth of transcendent ideas relating to what man can achieve for himself here on earth. We now know that we can fashion the world according to our needs and wishes, but we are at a point in time when we simply lack any widely-accepted ideas of what directions to move in, or what arrangements would satisfy material and psychological human needs.

The "transcendent" (what is not here and now) values and ideas which have normally been classified under "religious" experience must be integrated into all other facets of human knowledge and experience and must become the transforming

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

horizon of human existence.<sup>9</sup> There must be a unity between what we are, what we can be, and what we want to be, a fusion of the is and the ought. Ruether believes that there is an affinity between certain elements of traditional Christian thought and those modern secular ideologies of social change which have served, in the last century or so, as the "transcendent" visions of a better society.

Social change is never neutral, but involves a new set of conditions, an improvement over the old, evil, "fallen" state of affairs. Society is converted, brought to a "redeemed" condition--thus both the Christian gospel and ideologies of social change are concerned with redemption.<sup>10</sup> As she states:

"the theological doctrine (of redemption) therefore was never properly understood as simply a doctrine about the individual soul, but about man in his entirety; in his bodily, social, and historical existence. As soon as we see that the doctrine of redemption is about the human community in history, its affinity with ideologies of social reform becomes evident. The church has often avoided this implication by preaching redemption individually. . . This belies the very words of the creed itself, which say, 'We expect the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come'. . . What we expect is not individual spiritual immortality 'above' but bodily resurrection in a future world. Thus, the socio-historical dimension of redemption is basic to it."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Rosemary R. Ruether. The Radical Kingdom. New York: Harper and Row, 1970, Ch. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-3.

Thus, it is the apocalyptic theme of Christian faith that Ructher sees as the authentic kernel of the religion's tradition and the basis of meaning for contemporary mankind, a theme which faded away after the first century or so of Christian experience:

"The apocalyptic view of redemption is basically social and outer-directed. One does not look inward to the salvation of some personal essence; one looks outward at history and society, at injustice, oppression, and cruel and irrational destruction. It is this historical realm that is to be grappled with and radically reversed."<sup>12</sup>

Arend van Leeuwen, in presenting his grand theory of history, also focuses on the apocalyptic, eschatological themes of the Christian gospel. as the driving engines of man's experience, leading eventually to liberation from all oppressive earthly structures.<sup>13</sup> According to van Leeuwen, Judeo-Christianity has set in motion an irresistible historical dynamic, which has broken down all ontocratic conceptions of reality, bringing forth, in recent times, a complete secularization of man's philosophic outlook, establishing once and for all man's awareness of his abilities to fashion nature and society in line with his needs and wishes. The eschatological themes in Judeo-Christianity indicate that God, and his purposive action, resides in human history, and this history is

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>13</sup>Arend van Leeuwen. Christianity in World History. New York: Schribner, 1966.



moving towards the goal of complete de-sacralization and secularization, when man assumes complete responsibility for, and control over, his own destiny. These eschatological themes have set in motion other cultural and intellectual themes in Western history (i.e.: the Enlightenment, with its positivistic conceptions of man and nature), which have led to an increasing awareness on the part of Western man that, indeed, he can control nature and himself (social patterns of interaction, social production and distribution of material goods satisfying various human needs, etc.). In recent centuries we have seen the emergence of secular messianic movements which seek to liberate man from oppressive, exploitive, and dehumanizing social patterns. No longer must unequal, oppressive social arrangements be taken as the fixed necessities of an unchanging cosmic order. To van Leeuwen, this is evidence that God's purpose in history is nearly realized, and that a positive new phase of human existence is about to begin.

Richard Shaull agrees with van Leeuwen's thesis that God's action in history is moving man towards the goal of de-sacralization of himself and his social environment.<sup>14</sup> Man now makes history, and that history is becoming increasingly

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<sup>14</sup>Richard Shaull, "Revolutionary Change in Theological Perspective," in Harvey Cox (ed.). The Church Amid Revolution. New York: Associated Press, 1967, Ch. 1, pp. 27-47. This article also appears in John C. Bennett (ed.). Christian Social Ethics in a Changing World. New York: Associated Press, 1966, pp. 23-43.

eschatological, with God looking with favor on the oppressed. Gos is in the midst of historical struggle and change: he has taken human form in the concreteness of historical human life and is continually tearing down human structures which obstruct the realization of a more humanized existence.<sup>15</sup> God serves as a continual source of criticism of the dehumanizing elements of contemporary social reality.

In Joseph Petulla's view, as we noted earlier, Christian theology has alternated between the ontocratic view of society and a vision of society based on the notion of two "cities" or "realms" (with brief, isolated exceptions like the Radical Anabaptistis).<sup>16</sup> Now, the "new theology" returns to an idea of God in the world, only, unlike the ontocratic pattern, sees theology and religious experience engaged in an ongoing, practical, critical dialogue with those political and social institutions and relationships of modern society that are inherently oppressive and alienating.

Classical Christian theology proves inadequate when dealing with social and ethical matters in today's world. We need an analytical, investigative, and descriptive theological approach. Petulla believes "that Christianity and Marxism share a basic committment perspective on the question of man's alienation and liberation, which justifies the theologian's

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., in Cox, The Church Amid Revolution, p. 37.

<sup>16</sup>Joseph Petulla. Christian Political Theology. *ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

use of a Marxian analysis."<sup>17</sup> Marxism provides that scientific social analytic framework, though not without its shortcomings. Marx thought that philosophy should change the world--so should a politicized theology, according to Petulla. It should have the power to create awareness of social reality (that is, oppression and alienation) and the emotional involvement in the process of social change. Theology cannot remain an abstract, deductive process, focusing on other-worldliness. Politicized theology must be developed out of an active praxis within and against the social structures being described and analyzed.<sup>18</sup>

As a Marxist and atheist, Ernest Bloch rejected the literal, empirically verifiable existence of a transcendent God. Yet Bloch, whose works have studied and charted the history of human hope--the hope of oppressed peoples for a new and better life--has found much to appreciate in Christian teachings, especially those dealing with hope and expectations for an improved world.<sup>19</sup> For Bloch, hope is possibility, the possibility of a completely open future that is "not-yet-being," perhaps not even in the conscious mind. This hope animates

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>19</sup>Ernst Bloch. Das Prinzip Hoffnung. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1959. Also by the same author, Man on His Own. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970. Das Prinzip Hoffnung has not as yet been translated into English, but parts of it appear in Man on His Own.

oppressed people and creates the possibility for a new society. Bloch sees hope as the cornerstone of Christian teaching--its eschatological nature. That is why Christianity is so different from all other religions of ancient times and why it contains such potential for earth-shaking (and earth-changing) consequences:

"The preaching of Jesus, being eschatological in nature, was the least conciliatory toward the 'existing aeon' which was why it caused the greatest sensitivity to mere lip service and ecclesiastic compromise. Presenting a contrast was vital for it, far more than other religions, since it began as a thoroughly social movement among the laboring and heavily laden; at the same time it gave to those who labored and were heavily laden an impulse, a sense of values, and a hope they could never have found in the mere fact of their oppression--or have not found there, at least, in four thousand years."<sup>20</sup>

Bloch saw Christianity as a religion which has emerged from the mythical status quo orientation of earlier religions and was offering the potential for an explosive messianism. But to realize this potential, Bloch felt, Christianity had to discard the belief in a literal Supreme Being. Where there is a Supreme Being with the powers attributed to it by Christian teaching (omnipotence, omniscience--the power to perceive and thus shape all history), there can be no room for the idea of a freely creative humankind, shaping its own destiny (a fundamental principle of the neo-Marxist theory of history and historical development.)<sup>21</sup> The coming Kingdom of God must be

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<sup>20</sup>Ernst Bloch. Man on His Own, *ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 161.



secularized--it must not be identified with a transcendent God, but must be grounded in the real world of possibility.

Jurgen Moltmann, strongly influenced by Ernst Bloch, agrees with the Marxist that man is, by nature, a hopeful creature, and that the future must be open.<sup>22</sup> He also agrees with Bloch that biblical eschatology is the key to genuine Christianity, but strongly disagrees over the question of God's literal existence and atheism as the foundation of a revolutionary perspective. God does not interfere with man's freedom to shape history--God is not above us, or within us, but ahead of us, hidden in history, challenging and leading us through his teachings of love and brotherhood to mold the world in the image of these teachings.<sup>23</sup> God is constantly challenging the status quo institutions and arrangements by his teachings. We must all enter the historical drama to criticize the here and now and to infuse the revolutionary idea of hope for a better society into the present society.

Moltmann's contribution is the emphasis on the "new" or historical dimension of theology, and man's place in, and responsibility to, history. This overturns the historically dominant Christian theological concern with timelessness and the individualistic privatization which abstracts the person out of history, into a world of isolated concern

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<sup>22</sup>Jurgen Moltmann. A Theology of Hope. New York: Harpers, 1967.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

for individual salvation in the hereafter. To Moltmann, history is a continually flowing process--at any given time it is present man understanding the past and how the past shaped the present as well as the concrete possibility of how the present can shape the future based on the perception of the flow of time, events, and relationships from the what-has-gone-by to the not-as-yet. The perception of the flow of time itself is informed by hope, hope based on a conception of redemption and a new and better future for men on this earth.<sup>24</sup>

The future comes into our consciousness through our perception of, and struggles against, class exploitation, threats of war, famine, racial discrimination, and other forms of worldly misery.<sup>25</sup> The future is seen as a concrete utopia, an end to economic need, the political domination of some over others, and the realization of world peace and cooperation--this is the all-embracing vision and desire of God, the biblical God of promise, of Exodus and deliverance.<sup>26</sup>

The old theologies of a timeless God unconcerned with social problems believed in faith without hope (for this earthly life) and thus triggered atheistic, secular revolutionary movements like Marxism, whose members had "hope

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<sup>24</sup>Jurgen Moltmann. Religion, Revolution, and the Future. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969, Ch. 1.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 30-31.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

without faith."<sup>27</sup> Many individuals concerned with oppression, exploitation, and a desire for earthly justice rejected Christianity. Moltmann's writings are an attempt to reunite hope and faith in the building of a new world society.

Consistent with their new views of traditional theological questions, radical Christian writers have also explored new contours of age-old concepts and symbols peculiar to the religion. We have already seen, in the writings of Moltmann, van Leeuwen, and others, the notion that God is futurity, that God's grace allows us to transcend the present, fixed social arrangements, and that the events of history are God's judgement on our present. God acts in the present, forever smashing our grandiose ideas of a tranquil, stable present, yet, "God's redemptive activity does not interfere with man's creative ability."<sup>28</sup>

Yet the concept of God, central to Christianity as it is, is not the only important concept to be revised by the new Christian Leftists. For example, evil and sin, with their classic Christian individualistic emphasis, are seen by some as being no longer relevant, or at least less so than in earlier times. Patrick Kerans has urged the rejection of a simplistic, individualized morality in favor of

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>28</sup>Joseph Petulla. Christian Political Theology, *ibid.*, p. 236.

concepts of evil and sin which acknowledge the consequences of human behavior as well as knowledge and intention of wrong-doing.<sup>29</sup> To add the unintended consequences of human behavior to knowledge and intention, one immediately opens the door to a notion of social morality as well as "social evil" and "social sin." Thus, the consequences of socially structured collective action (intended or otherwise), if they result in debilitating conditions, such as poverty, blocked life chances, and other effects degrading to human dignity, are sinful, with all that entails for the placing of responsibility.

Joseph Petulla agrees that traditional Christian morality focused excessively on the individual while ignoring real evils which resulted from socially structured human behavior. Yet to go to the other extreme would also be folly: a balance must be struck. We must possess a healthy skepticism and admit that, to some extent at least, evil is inherent in man's nature and that no revolution can ever completely eradicate it.<sup>30</sup> But we must still seek those social arrangements which mitigate and control those tendencies (socialism, democratic, with a "human face," certainly not capitalism). Thus, Christianity, unlike Marxism, will

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<sup>29</sup>Patrick Kerans. Sinful Social Structures. New York: Paulist Press, 1974.

<sup>30</sup>Joseph Petulla. Christian Political Theology, *ibid.*, pp. 237-240.



always demand a permanent revolution.

The priests of the Golconda Group, while working among the deeply religious people of the Colombian barrios, have transformed traditional religious concepts and symbols into links with the real political world.<sup>31</sup> "Revelation" becomes an awareness of the system of injustice and privilege and of human needs which are being denied and can only be realized through revolution. "Incarnation" becomes a commitment to the people and to revolutionary political action. "Resurrection" becomes the creation of the new socialist man, born slowly out of the struggle against an oppressive system. The words of the traditional rite of the "Seven Words of Jesus on the Cross" performed during Holy Week are changed from "I thirst" to "I thirst for justice."<sup>32</sup>

Theological investigation also involves biblical scholarship, that is, the examination of the Old and New Testaments for clues as to the nature of God's intentions. Many radical Christians, like theologians of earlier periods, have also undertaken this work, and the literature of the new Christian Left is sprinkled with citations from the Bible purporting to show the traditional, though long ignored source of many ideas consistent with a radical political stance.

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<sup>31</sup>Rick Edwards, "Religion in the Revolution? . . . A Look at Golconda," in the North American Congress on Latin America Newsletter, vol. 3, no. 10, February, 1970, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

For example, Jose Miranda, a Mexican Roman Catholic biblical scholar, has tried to show, by a close textual analysis of the Old and New Testaments, that the Bible has been systematically misunderstood by the theologians of oppressive societies, feudal and capitalist.<sup>33</sup> In his view, the Bible closely corresponds to the essential themes of Marxian theory: oppression, alienation, class exploitation, human liberation, egalitarian justice, and an end of history--an age of better things. The following are selected passages from the Old and New Testaments which are often quoted by Miranda and other Christian radicals. With the exception of the passage from the Book of Ecclesiasticus, which is not contained in Protestant Bibles, all of the following can be found in The Oxford Annotated Bible: Revised Standard Edition;<sup>34</sup>

Old Testament:

"Many have sinned for the sake of profit;  
 he who hopes to be rich must be ruthless.  
 A peg will stick in the joint between two  
 stones and sin will wedge itself between  
 selling and buying."  
 (Ecclesiasticus 27: 1-2)

"The poor and the needy ask for water, and  
 there is none, their tongue is parched  
 with thirst.

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<sup>33</sup>Jose P. Miranda. Marx and the Bible. New York: Orbis Books, 1974.

<sup>34</sup>The Oxford Annotated Bible: Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.

I, Yahweh, will answer them.  
I, the God of Israel, will not abandon  
them."

(Isaiah 41: 17)

"They shall know that I am Yahweh when I  
break their yokestraps and release them  
from the land of their captors."  
(Ezekiel 34: 27)

"God, give your own judgement to the king,  
your own justice to the royal son,  
so that he may rule your people with  
justice and your poor with right."  
(Psalms 72: 1-2)

"Defend the poor and the orphan,  
do justice to the destitute and the  
helpless.  
Rescue the poor and the needy,  
deliver them from the hand of the  
unjust."  
(Psalms 82: 3-4)

"The unjust will perish once and for all  
and the children of the wicked shall be  
expelled;  
the just will have the land for their  
own,  
and make it their home forever."  
(Psalms 37: 28-29)

"Woe to the legislators of infamous laws,  
to those who issue tyrannical decrees  
who refuse justice to the needy  
and cheat the poor among my people of  
their right,  
who make widows their prey and rob the  
orphan."  
(Isaiah 10: 1-2)

#### New Testament

"He has scattered those who in the thought  
of their hearts are arrogant;

He has taken down potentates from their  
 thrones and exalted the lowly;  
 The hungry he has filled with good things  
 and the rich he has sent away empty."  
 (Luke: 51-53)

"My brothers, you were called, as you know,  
 to liberty."  
 (Galatians 5: 13)

"It is easier for a camel to pass through  
 the eye of a needle than for a rich man  
 to enter the kingdom of Heaven."  
 (Mark 10: 25; Matthew 19: 24;  
 Luke 18: 25)

"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,  
 for he has annointed me.  
 He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,  
 to proclaim liberty to captives, and  
 to the blind new sight,  
 to set the downtrodden free,  
 to proclaim the Lord's year of favor."  
 (Luke 4: 18)

These and other passages show, to Miranda and many other  
 modern radical Christians, that a theme of liberation from  
 social oppression runs throughout the Old and New Testaments,  
 a view shared by some earlier Christian and Jewish Biblical  
 scholars.<sup>35</sup> It is God's intention that an age of justice  
 and abundance be someday ushered into this earthly life. For

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<sup>35</sup>Alistair Kee (ed.). A Reader in Political Theology,  
 Ibid., Preface. See also Jose Miranda. Marx and the Bible,  
 Ibid., Joseph Petulla. Christian Political Theology, *ibid.*,  
 Jacques Ellul maintains that attempts to fashion theologies  
 of revolution occurred decades before the 1960's. See Jacques  
 Ellul. Autopsy of Revolution. New York: Knopf, 1971, p. 218.  
 (translated by Patricia Wolf).



that day to arrive, all earthly structures which exploit and oppress must be swept away. This eschatological theme provides an insight into the real essence and mission of Christianity, long ignored, but now an imperative for modern times.

For some modern Christian revolutionaries, particularly in Latin America, the writing of the new political theologies, a' la Moltmann, Miranda, Petulla, Ruether, and others, is all well and good, but simply cannot substitute for actual political action. For them, theology is created in the process of radical political action against unjust social conditions, not in some far-off study or academic setting, where admittedly concerned individuals simply describe injustice. Rene Garcia, spokesman for the Golconda Group, has criticized these members of the ecclesiastical Left, because "Their Theology cannot respond to the revolution, for theology is done in action."<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, "the dialogue which takes place in this movement between Christians and Marxists is not an intellectual luxury, but a practical necessity."<sup>37</sup> For the members of Golconda, and others, a theology of revolution is created in praxis, in commitment and struggle informed by Christian principles and Marxist analysis.

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<sup>36</sup>Rick Edwards, "Religion in the Revolution? . . . A look at Golconda," *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

Camilo Torres echoed this sentiment at the time of his decision to go underground and fight with guerillas:

"I have left the privileges and duties of the clergy, but I have not left the priesthood. I believe to have devoted myself to the revolution out of love for my neighbor in the temporal, economic, and social realms. When my neighbor has nothing against me, when I have realized the revolution, I will then say the Holy Mass again. Thus, I believe to obey Christ's command, 'If you are offering your gift to the altar, and there remember that your neighbor has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your neighbor, and then come and offer your gift.'"<sup>38</sup>

In other words, revolutionary political activity must take precedence over more traditional forms of religious practice. This is the essence of the theology of revolution, in the eyes of those who feel they are obeying God's command, "to set the downtrodden free."

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<sup>38</sup>Camilo Torres, "Message to Christians," in Arend van Leeuwen. Development Through Revolution. New York: Scribner, 1970, p. 52.

## CHAPTER VI

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY  
CHRISTIAN RADICALISM

Introduction. The preceding chapters have presented an overall picture of the contemporary Christian radical movement, its views of modern political reality, its general notions of a future "good society," its internal debates concerning strategies for changing present political arrangements, and its attempts at fashioning a theological justification for radical political activity. This chapter, while presenting the significant contribution made by the movement to the developing Christian political tradition, will also explore several areas of unresolved problems. As we will see, failure to come to grips with these tensions, inherent to the overall structure of radical Christian thinking, could fatally undermine the movement's intellectual and moral position.

The justification of violent resistance; from the just war to the just revolution. Critics of the modern radical Christians who advocate violent resistance have maintained that there is no foundation for this position in the political philosophy of the Christian tradition. Not only does the Christian heritage condemn violence per se (except in certain external circumstances), but also provides stern warnings against virtually any type of resistance activity. With a few isolated exceptions, such as the radical

millenarians, and the young Reinhold Niebuhr (who later mended his ways), the mainstream of the religion has, for the most part, strenuously avoided counseling any challenge (particularly a violent challenge) to legally constituted secular authority. Therefore, the modern phenomenon of clerical anti-capitalist revolution must be considered as a deviation from the Christian tradition.

A spokesman for this anti-radical viewpoint is Jacques Ellul, who, although highly critical of many aspects of mature capitalism, has also attacked many of the assumptions of modern Christian revolutionaries, especially those who would employ violence in seeking their objectives.<sup>1</sup>

Once again, Christian intellectuals have jumped on a socio-political bandwagon just as they have done in earlier times, with nationalism, for example. And once again, their belated identification, this time with modern left-wing revolution in defense of the exploited of the First and Third Worlds, has been too late to effect positively the course of development of secular political forces. Today, the poor exploited by capitalism are the new heroes, and violent, collectivist revolutionary socialism is the answer to all social problems, given the fact that Christ himself was poor and indicated that the poor would inherit

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Ellul. Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective. New York: Seabury Press, 1969. Translated by Cecilia E. Kings. See also Jacques Ellul. Autopsy of Revolution. New York: Knopf, 1971, pp. 217-232.



the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>2</sup> Defense of the poor is laudable in itself, says Ellul, but we must not equate Christianity with socialism, and especially with violent attempts to implement socialism.

Ellul sees any social order that does not strictly follow Christian teaching as an "order of Necessity" where violence is endemic.<sup>3</sup> There is no distinction, for him in the "order of Necessity," between overt violence, which all governments employ to remain in power, and "institutionalized violence" which is embedded, as the radical Christian claim, in unequal class relationships.<sup>4</sup> Violence, even if used by a majority against an exploiting minority, can never be justified--it destroys and corrupts the relations between men and causes people to forget the need for reconciliation. Violence will eventually corrupt all who become enthralled with its use, and who persist in, remaining in the order of necessity and ignoring God's injunction to

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 66-67. Ellul maintains that contemporary radical Christians have selective perception. They emphasize the suffering of those under capitalism, but fail to notice those who suffer as the result of policies, carried out by Communist nations. Perhaps some radical Christians have a blind romantic attachment to socialism, but many have heeded Ellul's warning, and taken a closer look at life in many Communist bloc nations. They have not approved what they have seen.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-88.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 97-98. Later, Ellul says: "The capitalist who, operating from his headquarters, exploits the mass of workers or colonial peoples, is just as violent as the guerrilla." (p. 130).

lead a moral, non-violent life.

Ellul, perceives certain "laws of violence" influencing human relations in the order of necessity:<sup>5</sup>

1. Violence is continuous--once it begins it becomes the logic of all human relationships;
2. Violence is reciprocal--violence begets violence and it is therefore foolish to try to legitimate its use in any instance;
3. Violence in all its forms is indetical--to Ellul there is no distinction between "good" and "bad" violence, that which "liberates" and that which "enslaves," that which is physical and overt, and that which is covertly institutional, such as economic exploitation and psychological, cultural manipulation. Once you begin to justify one kind of violence (liberating and revolutionary), you have to allow for all kinds, even counter-revolutionary, since violence is always and everywhere the same;
4. Nobel ends can never justify violent means--the "better" post-revolutionary system will simply be violence reinstitutionalized. Violence can never establish a just society, since a political movement which emphasizes overt violence can never really affect the roots of social injustice and inequality;
5. Political actors, regrettably, will always try to justify violence in the realm of necessity, but in the end, that is not possible.

Only by following the nonviolent way of Christ can we ever hope to escape the order of necessity where violence is normal (which began with the fall of Adam). The problem

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 93-108.

with modern Christian radicals, says Ellul, is that they seem to have forgotten that a true Christian must always reject violence. If we stand in defense of the poor and exploited, who have a good cause, we must eschew violence and always warn of its consequences, never lending a "Christian moral legitimacy" to its use. We can remain truly human only by following the dictum: "Thou shalt not kill."

At the same time, says Ellul, we must not withdraw from the world into a realm of purely spiritual values, ignoring the processes of the material world. We must intercede for the poor and the exploited, stand up for their claims, and urge their cause peacefully. Without resorting to violence, we can serve as a mediator between the poor and the powerful.

At first glance, it would seem that Ellul is correct, for the traditional Christian position on violence has never been able to accept one of the central features of modern political thought: internal revolution and its almost assured violent nature. The post-Enlightenment age, along with its discovery of man's rational autonomy and historical ability to fashion utopias, also discovered that the greatest impediment to historical perfection was the existence of class exploitation and unequal patterns of power within society. In order for the millennium to be achieved, it

would be necessary to remove these impediments through revolutionary political action, most likely provoking violence in the process. Marxism was not the first philosophic position to discover this principle, but it was probably the most comprehensive statement on the subject. And the French and Russian revolutions were simply large-scale enactments of the idea. The Christian heritage, with its severe restrictions on violent behavior, its strong tendency to support a position of political obligation, and its general suspicion of earth-shaking remedies for temporal injustice, was left by the wayside at this historical juncture. It is no wonder then, that individuals seeking temporal improvement were forced into the arms of secular movements of political and social change, movements which themselves develop an understandable anti-clericalism.

As we noted throughout this work, contemporary Christian radicals, accepting the socialist idea that domestic inequality and its impact on the members of the lower classes is the principal problem of the modern age, have also questioned their church's condemnation of domestic political violence. Many have gone to the point where revolutionary violence is either accepted or is at least entertained as a justifiable option in the struggle. In making this major step, Christian radicals have looked to the religion's past for ideas that can be synthesized with the modern theme of internal war. In doing so, modern Christian rebels



have begun to forge a Christian theory of violent revolt, a religious justification for revolutionary action. By blending elements of the traditional "just war" theory, and earlier notions of the nature of earthly institutions, with the ideas of the modern age of revolution, they may very well have brought the Christian tradition of political philosophy back into the mainstream of modern social thought.

The traditional just war theory, especially as set out by St. Augustine, allowed Christian participation in collective violent activities because certain limited temporal goods were to be achieved. A just war was an attempt to restore a condition of peace after the peace had been disrupted by the wrongful acts of another society. The restoration of peace, as we noted in the second chapter, was all important to Augustine, as were the intentions of those who set out to right the temporal wrong. Augustine, and later Aquinas, realistically perceived that humans would react violently when they felt temporal notions of justice had been violated. Therefore, they placed restrictions on inter-societal violence so as to force Christians to come to grips with their own motives, as well as the need to restore earthly tranquility as soon as possible. We might describe the classical just war theory as an attempt to balance the natural human drive for the attainment of some measure of earthly justice with the crucial requirement

of earthly order.

But what if the focus of human disorder and injustice is shifted away from inter-societal relationships, and toward the affiliations of men within a society? What if, as the general body of socialist thought claims, the perceived injustice and threat to human harmony stems from unequal class relations, whereby those who possess social power use that capability to maintain an injurious life situation for the bulk of the population? Would the general logic of the traditional just war theory serve as the intellectual and moral foundation for a violent assault on that class-stratified structure? The modern Christian radicals, in their attempts to formulate a justification for violent resistance, believe that it does.

Modern Christian rebels have self-consciously borrowed from the logic of the traditional just war theory when trying to come to grips with their own participation in political violence.<sup>6</sup> From their own perspective, the institutional, the occasional overt violence, of developed capitalist societies and those Third World nations within the orbit of capitalism, constitutes a grave injustice. Ignorance, malnutrition, lack of decision-making power, and blocked life chances are the direct result of class inequality, and are a serious wrong that must be rectified through

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<sup>6</sup>For example, see "The Just Revolution," in Cross Currents, vol. 18, no. 1, Winter, 1967, pp. 67-70.

political means.

Furthermore, this situation is a threat to human harmony because the masses of the world are awakening, slowly but surely, to the realization that conditions can be improved. In modern times observers have described a "revolution of rising expectations" in the Third World, where the masses have begun to demand a better existence for themselves and their posterity. Earlier, the working classes of the now-developed Western capitalist nations underwent a revolution of rising expectations of their own, demanding, and partially receiving a larger slice of the pie of national wealth, as well as increased power in society. At any rate, the mass awareness in both areas clashes with the reality of class differentials of privilege and power, producing, especially in the Third World, a tension within society which could erupt into revolutionary violence.

This being the case, the evil of revolutionary political violence becomes the lesser of evils, for the tension-laden atmosphere of the present can be transcended by a left-wing movement seizing power and establishing a better, juster social order which will be the realization of a permanent peace. Radical Christians have generally accepted the Marxian notion that the elimination of capitalist forms of social organization will bring about an end to "history" (class conflict and all the social dislocation that concept

implies). Therefore, as Camilo Torres maintained, it is better "to be violent once and for all in order to destroy the violence which the economics minorities exercise against the people."<sup>7</sup> A "state of war" already exists within society, so the purpose of revolutionary violence, say these exponents of resistance, is to win the class war as soon as possible and provide a lasting, worth-while peace. Other authors, in establishing the conditions for justified violent resistance also focus on the state of war, or institutionalized violence, that already exists within these societies.<sup>8</sup>

Christian radicals also apply the logical structure of the just war theory when discussing the intentions of those who would employ violence for the creation of a just and lasting peace.<sup>9</sup> Violent resistance must not be engaged

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<sup>7</sup>John Gerassi (Ed.). Revolutionary Priest: Complete Writings and Messages of Camilo Torres. New York: Vintage, 1971, p. 27. This same idea is echoed by Roger Schutz. Violent for Peace. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970; and Hildegard Coss-Mayr, "Peace Through Revolution" (translated by T. L. Westow and J. R. Foster), in Franz Bockle. The Social Message of the Gospels. (Consilium, Vo. 35). New York: Paulist Press, 1968.

<sup>8</sup>"The Just Revolution," *ibid.*, pp. 67-70. Also see "Latin America: Lands of Violence" in John Gerassi (Ed.), *ibid.*, pp. 442-446; "A Letter from Latin American Workers to Paul VI" in IDO-C Staff (Eds.). When All Else Fails. Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1970, pp. 192-198; and Bertrand Duclos, "Let My People Go," in When All Else Fails, pp. 221-222.

<sup>9</sup>"The Just Revolution," *ibid.*; Robert McAfee Brown. Religion and Violence. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973, pp. 78-88; and "Violence, Nonviolence, and the Struggle for Social Justice," in The Ecumenical Review. Vol. 35, no. 4, October, 1973.



in for the purpose of exacting revenge on the former oppressors once power has been seized. Nor must it be employed in a suicidal attempt at providing future symbols of martyrdom for later rebels. The revolution must have a reasonable chance for success. Finally, it must be decided that the suffering created, for all parties involved, by the violent resistance, would not be greater than the prolongation of the institutionalized violence of the status quo.

A second area of traditional Christian thought which points in a direction favorable to the radical Christian position is the question of the nature of earthly social institutions. As we saw in the fifth chapter, a tension exists in the Christian heritage, produced by an Augustinian conception of social order as essentially utilitarian, coexisting with an ontocratic Thomistic viewpoint which perceives human structures as a positive good in themselves, the embodiment of divine rationality in worldly affairs. If one sees present earthly institutions (social inequality backed by government) as utilitarian, existing to provide order for human affairs, and this utilitarian, existing to provide order for human affairs, and this utilitarian function is not being fulfilled because of the inherent social tensions produced by these present institutions, then one is inclined to replace them with alternatives designed to provide a more humane, more stable life.

On the other hand, if one subscribes to the ontocratic, Thomistic conception of social and political order, the status quo takes on a more fixed and defensible character, especially if the challenge to that polity comes from a movement whose philosophic foundations are not part of the legal-moral framework of community life. The Thomistic position makes it very difficult for a new legal-moral stance to break into the existing arrangement, especially if that new idea is resisted by the present order and forced to take up a stance of political resistance (as we have defined that concept earlier). For now, the new idea, and the movement which embodies it, must begin the process of factional challenge, a process alien to the Thomistic system of thought. This problem could be avoided if, over a considerable period of time, the bulk of the population accepted the challenging idea and made it the new legal-moral foundation of society. Since the people of a modern society are the "appointive power" (in Thomistic terms), there would no longer be a problem of factional challenge. But, in the conditions of a class-dominated situation, where the rulers control the process of political socialization (the institutions of education and informative dissemination), this appears highly unrealistic. For this reason then, the overall Thomistic scheme, with its ontological premise that the present institutions of community life are the reflections of a natural law of human sociability emanating from the

divine will, no matter what form they take, generates a conservative bias which strengthens the position of the status quo.

Therefore, Christian radicals can adopt the Augustine theology and argue that the socialist institutions of the future society would simply do a better job of providing that stability necessary for the realization of the higher goal of salvation and the worship of God. Perhaps that is what Camilo Torres meant when he said:

" . . .when I have realized the revolution, I will then say the holy Mass again. Thus I believe to obey Christ's command, 'If you are offering your gift to the altar, and there remember that your neighbor has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your neighbor, and then come and offer your gift.'"<sup>10</sup>

We believe the modern Christian radicals have made some considerable headway in establishing a Christian justification of violent resistance, by their synthesizing certain traditional Christian ideas on the moral use of force, and on the utilitarian nature of political institutions, with the key elements of modern, secular revolutionary theory. They have taken the structure and intent of the centuries-old just war theory and turn its focus inward, to the conflicts threatening the peace of modern societies. If one accepts the premise that conditions in many modern societies can be

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<sup>10</sup>Camilo Torres, "Message to Christians," in Arend van Leeuwen. Development Through Revolution. New York: Scribner, 1970, p. 52.

characterized as institutionalized violence, and that these conditions are leading to increased class conflict, then the blanket statement of Jacques Ellul, that all violence is morally indefensible, must be seriously doubted. However, as we will see in the following sections, the Christian radicals have failed to explore fully the problems their position necessarily produces. Some of the warnings of Ellul and others have a great deal of cogency, and the Christian rebels ignore them only at their own peril, practically and morally speaking.

The problem of response. A number of radical Christian spokesmen have attempted to provide guidelines for their fellows, on the question of the degree of revolutionary violence that should be approximately employed against the degree of social injustice existing in a particular society. This is an important area of concern, because an excessive use of violence in a particular situation would violate the stated humanist goals of the movement. A thin line, which no one will ever be able to sufficiently demarcate, separates the appropriate application of anti-establishment violence from the area of cruel and unnecessary terrorism. Our purpose, in this section, is to show that, up until now, the Christian radical movement has failed to provide adequate counsel for its members on this very crucial problem.

The authors of "Violence, Nonviolence, and the Struggle for Social Justice" have declared certain actions like torture,



innocent hostage-taking, and the indiscriminate killing of innocent people, as pure terrorism, and wrong in any situation.<sup>11</sup> Yet they go no further in establishing a schedule of violent responses suitable for variable situations of social injustice and political repression. They indicate that general principles are difficult, if not impossible, to apply to various conditions, and that individuals in the movement should probably not give advice, but simply allow the actual participants involved to decide on a case-by-case basis.<sup>12</sup>

The authors of "The Just Revolution" indicate that when institutional or overt violence, or both, exist, when all lawful means of criticism and protest have been employed with no results, and when nonviolent forms of resistance have been used, also with no results, then violent resistance is appropriate.<sup>13</sup> Robert McAfee Brown also advises radicals to exhaust legal channels of protest and mobilization, as well as nonviolent methods of resistance, before resorting to violence.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Brown condemns indiscriminate violence, urging overt force only in well thought out situations and as sparingly as the situation allows.

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<sup>11</sup>The Ecumenical Review, Vol. 25, no. 4., October, 1973.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 17 of The Ecumenical Review offprint.

<sup>13</sup>"The Just Revolution," ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Robert McAfee Brown. Religion and Violence, ibid., pp. 78-88.

These sincere attempts at exploring the level of violence to be used in differing situations is laudable, but far more analysis must be carried out by Christian radicals if they are to avoid the moral and pragmatic pitfalls of excessive violence. The first, and by far the most important, problem they must face, is the whole idea of institutionalized violence. We noted in an earlier chapter how most people perceive violence as an overt and intentional act. Modern radicals, on the other hand, have broadened the concept to include the unintended consequences of class-stratified societies: poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, lack of real political decision-making power, in short, stifled life chances for the masses. This conception of violence is based on their belief that great inequalities are not an inherent characteristic of social life and that present social arrangements can be significantly altered with beneficial results for all people. Since the present holders of power have not acted to change the negative conditions described above, whether they intend harm to the lower orders or not, they are guilty of carrying out "violence" against them. Thus, a condition of class war exists, and radicals are thereby justified in taking overtly violent steps to alleviate the situation. It is another way of describing self-defense.

If the current power structure was rounding up dissidents, putting them on trial (for trumped-up charges, with

the clear intent of destroying the movement), and imprisoning them, or, more directly, unleashing death squads on radicals and their proletarian supporters, there would be no problem in admitting the justification of revolutionary counter-violence. We could probably go so far as to include rigged elections, the systematic denial of left-wing political forces of a legal platform for the propagation of their views, denial of parade and demonstration permits, etc. (in short, self-conscious political repression) as forms of violence. These conditions are probably dominant in most of Latin America and must of the rest of the Third World.

But what if political channels are open, and no repression exists? Do we include as "violence" a legislative process (and its individual members) that maintains a tax system which favors the wealthy though consciously set up under the belief that it will spur economic growth and development? Or a judicial system that applies general laws fairly, though failing to recognize that a poverty-stricken man held up a grocery store to feed his starving family? Or a religious institution that teaches the lowly that their ultimate reward lies in the hereafter and that all violence in all situations is wrong?

The problem here resides in the fact that we ordinarily hold people responsible for their actions when they knowingly do something that results in a negative condition for another person or persons. The legislators, bureaucrats,

policemen, judges, and priests mentioned above clearly do not intend injustice to come about because of their actions. They do not intend (not usually, anyway) that the lowly be hurt by these collective processes. They simply hold to different political and social paradigm than do the radicals, with differing notions of inequality and its results, as well as future human possibility (that is, the possibility of ending social and political inequality, poverty and its effects on people). If one subscribes to the paradigm roughly described as classical conservatism, or to a classical liberal-pluralist framework, then the socialist idea that equality can and should be realized appears as an inappropriate ideal. Indeed, from these perspectives, equality appears dangerous, a flouting of the laws of human nature, or the experience of history. For the people who hold these anti-left paradigms, the accusation that elites are responsible for the maintenance of cruel conditions for the lower orders of society appears wholly unjust for inequalities are the result of natural processes, or the laws of the marketplace, not deliberate action.

Radicals would probably respond by pointing out that the technical and economic bases for improvement exist, (except perhaps in the poorer nations of the Third World) and that for a long period of time progressive forces of the left and center-left have been urging the broader distribution of wealth and political power. This being the case, the



holders of power cannot plead ignorance, and the fact that the means exist for social improvement implies that the failure to mobilize social resources for the improvement of all people points to an insensitive lack of political will. As we can see, a nearly insoluble argument is taking place in modern politics.

At any rate, do radicals have a right to carry out violence against people who do not share their perspective and who have not intended that the conditions of poverty continue to exist? Even if one answers in the affirmative, when should radicals cross the boundry between nonviolence and violence? When all legal, systemic methods of political change have been closed off to them? Or when all legal methods have been used, to no avail? Or when all illegal but nonviolent methods been employed, also to no avail? How does one know when all of these methods have been used up? These are questions that have only been partially explored by Christian radicals, and which must be further studied in the concrete circumstances of everyday politics. Various societies differ considerably in the latitude given to dissenting groups to engage in legal, or illegal, but non-violent, activities. Left-wing Christians must study each particular situation carefully before answering these questions in such a way that violence appears as the only remaining viable option.

Even when one accepts the relevance of the concept of institutionalized violence, other problems emerge for the Christian radicals. In the conditions of modern class conflict, who is an innocent person? Is assassination (using methods which could kill or injure more than the single target individual or individuals) or the taking of hostages become acceptable means of political action, are children to be included? The old or the infirm? Women? Are the human targets of political violence to be limited to the rich and very powerful, that is, the owners or managers of the means of production along with high-level government officials? What about the middle levels of power? In any complex society, the middle class (intellectuals, teachers, journalists, ordinary government bureaucrats, other professional workers), as well as military and police functionaries, play a crucial role in the maintenance of social inequality. Very often their attitudes correspond to those of the upper class in supporting an inegalitarian social structure. This has presented socialist movements of the past with great theoretical difficulties, and in a situation of radical resistance, can cause serious moral and practical quandries. Although the middle classes may benefit, at least in principle, with radical social changes, their current roles may necessitate their being targeted for violence. Not only that, they may resist the revolutionary process, either before or after the taking of power, spurring stern reprisals. But

surely the cruelest irony of all involves the working class soldier or police officer, who must engage directly in violent conflict with those whose intention is to liberate him from capitalist exploitation.

This question of "innocent" bystanders to the revolutionary process is not simply a subject of idle speculation. As we will see below, the social relationships of modern society make this problem a matter of central importance to those who would employ violence for the creation of a better social order.

Bureaucracy, technology, and the costs of resistance. Because of social changes characteristic of recent times, as well as scientific and technological advancement, modern government possesses an impressive capability to defend itself against resistance groups. Large-scale bureaucracy, with its superior policy implementing ability as well as its information collection, storage, and retrieval capacities, has become the standard form of organization for a nation's internal and external security forces. Not only does the security complex possess modern weapons which can inflict death and destruction on large numbers of people, over widely scattered areas in a short time, it also commands a highly advanced technical apparatus which allows it to combat "ordinary" and "political" crime as never before. Even Third World nations, thanks to the generosity of developed nations like the United States, can proudly demonstrate

their advanced policing system.

Modern communications equipment ties the various police agencies and units together, allowing them to respond within minutes to suspected resistance activity. Computers now store enormous amounts of data on suspected individuals and can produce that information instantly on request. Electronic surveillance equipment now allows the security complex access to private areas and conversations, usually without the subjects being aware of it. Metal detectors can screen potentially dangerous individuals from airplanes (which could be hijacked) and other areas that must be secured (such as rooms or gatherings where assassination attempts may be made). Explosives detectors can find hidden bombs, and even locales where bombs are being manufactured for later use. Airborne detecting devices can trace human body odor and body heat in jungles and other covered terrain.

Suffice it to say, modern technology in the hands of an efficient policy-military bureaucracy makes the job of political resistance that much more difficult. No longer is it as easy as it once was to assassinate or kidnap the very important individuals of a society, since they can be protected by this highly professionalized security force. Furthermore, this advanced capability makes it easier for the police to develop leads on resistance groups, and then to follow up those leads by systematically hunting down



the suspects.

This being the case, radicals might be tempted to step up the degree (and methods) of violence directed against the rulers. For radicals also possess increasingly powerful and complex weaponry: machine guns, high explosives, shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles, bazookas, mortars and possibly, given the wide dissemination of nuclear information and material, atomic bombs. If airlines can no longer be hijacked, they can easily be destroyed by anti-aircraft missiles, which are light, highly efficient, easy to use, and requiring only one trained operator. If VIPs are heavily guarded by advanced security techniques, they can still be killed by long-distance artillery barrages (mortars, etc.). If that option is closed off, the lightly guarded, or completely unguarded, individuals who make up the middle levels of power, can still be reached through violence. All of these options have one thing in common: innocent (or "less guilty") people will be killed or injured. The new techniques of mass destruction don't politically discriminate as well as human actors. Also, in the face of tight security, it becomes tempting to snatch the unguarded and use these hostages as bargaining chips in dealing with the government. The ultimate hostage-taking would be through nuclear blackmail, in which an entire city could be threatened with destruction unless the government responded positively to radical demands.

Given these characteristics of the modern politics of

insurgency, it seems as if an inexorable process is at work, producing ghastlier forms of indiscriminate terrorism. In the film "The Battle of Algiers," scores of French women and children are shredded by a glass-enclosed high explosive bomb set off in an ice cream parlor by Algerian anti-colonialist. Compared to the choice targets, they were relatively unguarded, and their gruesome deaths served to make a political point to the French. Likewise at Tel Aviv airport, where three Japanese Red Army terrorists, working for the PLO, massacred a score of innocent tourists in an attempt to teach the Israeli government the error of its ways. Activities like these have become increasingly common in the conditions of modern resistance.

With one major exception, radical Christians have failed, to deal with this question of the increased costs of resistance. Only Helder Camara, in his discussion on the "spiral of violence," has attempted to fathom out the problems involved, warning his fellow radicals that modern-day violent resistance can easily lead to an undesired carnage.<sup>15</sup> When the popular forces respond to deep-seated and persistent social injustice through limited applications of force, the authorities will respond by employing their sophisticated security system, also utilizing force. This in turn will provoke the resistance movement to step up its violent actions,

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<sup>15</sup>Helder Camara. Spiral of Violence. London: Sheed and Ward, 1971.

setting off a spiral of response and counter-response, until all-out internal war results. Camara never mentions this, but security forces have been known to deliberately up the ante, in hopes that the radical response will help to justify a final, total establishment crackdown that will silence all political opposition.

Camara believes that nonviolent resistance such as tax revolts, economic boycotts, strikes, occupations, demonstrations, and selective disobedience, makes a lot more pragmatic and moral sense. The costs of violent resistance can take the form of large-scale and unnecessary blood-letting as well as the unleashing of powerful currents of hostility which will poison the social environment even after the popular seizure of power. This will make it difficult to establish a just, peaceful order because revenge will then play a great role in public policy formation.

His argument makes a great deal of sense, especially in the light of the just war theory of violent action. If the purpose of the "just revolution" is to establish a better peace, it is hard to imagine such an improvement coming about after a wide-scale internal war in which great numbers of relatively innocent people have been deliberately butchered. From the point of view of the Christian ethic, it would surely be better not to have taken any action at all, than to provoke such a horrible result.

The participatory democracy of Christian radicalism and

the planned socialist economy. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the Christian radicals share with their secular New Left allies an optimistic vision of a future participatory democracy, in which corporativist bureaucratic institutions and vast social inequalities in the political and economic realms will have been discarded. These stifling structures, which deny most individuals a meaningful role in the making of decisions which effect their own lives, will be replaced by institutions which embody the new ethic of revolutionary humanism. Under this new system, mechanisms will be established which will involve all or most people, recognizing their essential equality, and allowing all to have a direct controlling impact on social policy. At the same time, the Christian radicals want to abolish capitalism, and replace it with a socialist economy in which at least the commanding heights of the production and financial process are community controlled. These simultaneous desires create major theoretical and practical problems, and should force the Christian radicals to re-examine their ideas on the nature of the socialist society of the post-revolutionary period.

The rejection of capitalism and the adoption of socialism does not automatically bring with it the egalitarian participatory democracy. Christian radicals seem to be aware of this when they criticize the Soviet bloc experiment in socialism and promise improvements on the earlier model.



However, their writings indicate a certain ignorance of the inherent tensions between mass participation, and the requirements of a complex, dynamic economic process, particularly a socialist one.

In any economy, mechanisms must exist to make the fundamental decisions on social investment and production. What goods, and in what quantities, will be produced? Where will they be produced (what regions and municipalities will prosper, and which won't, in relative terms)? What is the most efficient (in capital, resource or human terms) method of producing these goods? How does one know when the production process has become absolescent, thereby demanding replacement (with resulting human dislocation)? How is the social product to be distributed? Are some roles more important than others? And if so, how much differential reward should be allocated between different roles? How do new needs, material and psychological, arise and how are they met--how is it determined that a new need is justified in claiming relative priority status in the overall production process? How is the economic process integrated into the foreign policy-making process? Since a foreign policy invariably reflects social economic needs, at least to some extent, what directions will it seek? How will it react to nations' actions (and possessions)?

Advocates of the participatory democracy would argue that an educated, selfless populace will directly (or at

least more directly than in any social organization yet seen) make these decisions, in their capacities as workers and citizens. Only an unreflective supporter of Rousseau's notion of the General Will would maintain that this could be accomplished smoothly, without serious problems. Honest disputes can arise over all of the questions asked in the preceding paragraph, and the failure to answer quickly those questions, or the social conflict generated by the opposing viewpoints, would seriously undermine community life.<sup>16</sup>

What levels of remuneration should be allocated to what jobs? Are some people worth more than others because of the degree of importance attached to their function in society, or because of the danger of their tasks? Where will important production facilities be located? If they are moved to different areas, the former home regions could suffer serious economic difficulties. Is the move to the new region worth the economic costs involved? Will ecological considerations force drastic changes in production, with temporary negative effects felt by the thousands, or even millions, involved? Will the "new needs" be recognized and decided upon by majority vote? If so, what do the losers do,

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<sup>16</sup>This author shares with the radical Christians, the view that "experts" are not required to make these fundamental decisions, that ordinary people, sufficiently educated and interested, are perfectly qualified to make decisions on areas of social production, investment, design of the conditions of the workplace, and other crucial areas of policy making. As we will see below, that can be the problem.

simply go along silently with what they consider to be ridiculous (and possibly dangerous) decisions?

As this brief list of questions clearly suggests mass participation in decision-making could well lead to serious and honest disputes over the best way to conduct a society's collective business. Everyone eventually becomes an interested party to disagreement, thus perhaps paralyzing or embittering the policy-making process. The most obvious way to alleviate the problem is to allow some restricted institution, or set of institutions, to make some of these decisions. Of course, this turns the focus of decision-making away from mass participation and towards bureaucracy (even if an accountable one).

Historical experience has shown us, however, that once the turmoil and the extreme demands of the revolution have subsided, and the bureaucratic institutions take over the day-to-day process of decision-making, the ideals of equality usually begin to suffer.<sup>17</sup> Soon, more and more areas of social life are controlled and directed by the distant and restricted structures, and a meritocracy, an elite of the talented, arises as the new governmental system. Although there is probably nothing (inexorable" about this sequence of developments, radical Christians should be forewarned that history surely indicates some sacrificing of the ideal of

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<sup>17</sup>Milovan Djilos. The New Class. New York: Praeger, 1957; and Robert Michels. Political Parties. New York: Collier, 1962.

pure egalitarian participation for the necessity of efficiency and the assault on scarcity. One of the cardinal principles of modern socialists thought is the reliance on economic planning, especially in the conditions of scarcity existing in the Third World. Planning, up to now, has been carried out by limited numbers of experts and party leaders who have eschewed participation.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the tension between popular involvement and coordination means that a creative balancing between these two polar requirements will have to be realized, guided by the maxim that participation should be tried and only replaced by an accountable bureaucratic mechanism when it has proven its shortcomings. And the moral burden of holding the representative governing institutions accountable will fall on the people.

Christianity and Marxism; problems in philosophic and political compatibility. We have seen earlier that in the 1960s, a Christian-Marxist dialogue was established by both academicians and political practitioners, for the purpose of ironing out philosophic differences between the two systems of thought as the prelude to common political action. This political action would replace the exploitive fetters of capitalism by the egalitarian humanism of a socialist society, informed by the basic principles of Marxism and Christianity, as explored and articulated by the participants in the dialogue.

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<sup>18</sup>The Kronstadt Rebellion in the USSR in 1921, and its subsequent repression offers a good example.



Many areas of common concern were developed by the participants, who saw themselves as forming a new union of thought and action which might someday transform the world. However, some participants, as well as outside critics, perceived certain basic areas which could never be easily synthesized, areas which would remain as sore points.

Although Marxism is only one variant of the general philosophy of socialism, it is by far the dominant variant of modern times, having the most profound impact on individuals with left-wing political perspectives. And it is the Marxian conception of historical human behavior which is the key problem area.

In regard to the question of historical development and the autonomy of human action, the two systems of thought operate on fundamentally different assumptions, that is, mutually exclusive foundations which make complete accord impossible. For one of the systems to compromise in order to make synthesis possible, would mean that system rejecting its basic defining characteristic. Either Marxism would no longer be Marxism as we have known it, or else Christianity would have become so utterly transformed as to have lost that element which makes it a separate, distinguishable religion. Our point is that Marxists and Christians may work together in the political world to effect similar humanistic social changes in the manner each system perceives the necessity and desirability for these historical changes. But in the end,

Marxism and Christianity represent two fundamentally different views of the world of thought and action, differences that will always create tensions between the two. They can never be fully reconciled.

To Marxism, human reality is the mutual interaction and interdependence of human consciousness and empirical nature.<sup>19</sup> Human ideas and conceptions arise in history and are the product of the relationship existing between human consciousness and the developing substructural base of society, made up of the relations of production and the ever-changing forces of production. Changing and developing human activity in history, or praxis, is the complete fusion of consciousness and the material, economic base of social organization. In other words, there can be no independent reality existing outside of the historically evolving human praxis, which shapes or guides the activities of persons, and which people could conceivably discover in their search for real knowledge. Man alone, shapes history.

Thus, the literal existence of a transcendent God existing outside of history is totally incompatible with

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<sup>19</sup>Louis Dupre', "Marx and Religion: An Impossible Marriage," in Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (Eds.). New Theology, No. 6. London: Macmillan, 1969, pp. 151-164. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The German Ideology. New York: International Publishers, 1970. (Edited, with an introduction by C. J. Arthur), pp. 39-64.

Marx's conception of history and collective human action.<sup>20</sup> All interpretations of man and society which do not take into account the active relationship of nature and human consciousness as the sole basis of the fashioning of historical reality, are, a priori, false, and relegated to the status of a false ideology, a belief which clouds man's understanding of himself. Louis Dupré has summarized the tension between Marxism and religion thusly:

"Any theory that does not have its roots in man's active relation to nature and the social conditions necessitated by this relation lacks the only possible basis of sound theory. Now this is obviously the case for religion, for in religion man claims precisely to transcend his relation to nature. . . (for Marx) any absolute transcendence is out of the question. . . . Such an economic determinism (like Marxism) leads to unsatisfactory results in all fields of culture. To religion it strikes the death blow, for it excludes the existence of any reality independent of the material production."<sup>21</sup>

The existence, then, of an all-powerful God who has created the world and set in motion the underlying laws governing that world, would necessarily deprive Marxism of the validity it claims for its materialist conception of history. Man and his autonomous relation to nature and history could no longer stand up to the claims of a theory of history in which the power of an outside force had established the parameters of human action.

Christianity, of course, claims to speak in the name

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<sup>21</sup>Dupré, *ibid.*, pp. 159-164.

of a force standing outside human history. A transcendent, omnipotent being has created the world and everything in it, including man. Omnipotence and omniscience make no sense unless the creator possesses the full and complete capability of overall creation and the knowledge of the end results of the processes taking place in all created matter. For this state of affairs to exist means, first and foremost, that the autonomy of created matter, including that with imperfect consciousness, is necessarily limited. Within the processes established by the supreme being, created beings with consciousness possess, at best, a limited capacity to fashion the overall process of history. They are fooling themselves if they think otherwise.

Furthermore, Christianity maintains that the son of this supreme being took human form and suffered at the hands for the purpose of providing imperfect beings with the opportunity for salvation, for blissful eternal life in another existence after physical death. This devine intervention in the historical process was a gift from God, meaning that salvation is therefore not something which can be acquired by man acting on the strength of his own temporal knowledge and abilities alone. Salvation is an interaction between human will and divine will, that is, a person consciously following certain dictates emanating from the will of God. If this is true, and Christians, to be Christians, must believe it to be true, then it is difficult to understand



any materialist conception of history. Marxist or non-Marxist, as possessing any degree of validity.

Ernst Bloch, the Marxist humanist mentioned in an earlier section of this work, who deeply appreciated the element of hope contained in the message of Christianity, perceived this incompatibility between the two philosophies.<sup>22</sup> As a consistent Marxist, he called for Christians to give up their belief in the literal existence of a supreme being, while still retaining the kernel of the ideal of hope contained in the religion's basic outlook. Only in this way, Bloch felt, could the idea of hope peculiar to Christianity and Marxism, be realized in the creation of a better world here on earth. Man would now have to assume complete responsibility for his condition.

John Petulla has argued in much the same vein in discussing the shortcomings of the new radical political theology:

"Christians believe that, with God, all things are possible, but a transcendent kingdom cannot serve as an empirical model for the world today. One need not subscribe to a Marxian ideology to ask what methodological connections exist between the present society and the eschatological kingdom."<sup>23</sup>

Many radical theologians of hope and revolution see the socialist commonwealth as the end of God's march through history. But

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<sup>22</sup>Ernst Bloch. Man On His Own. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

<sup>23</sup>Joseph Petulla. Christian Political Theology. New York: Orbis Books, 1972, p. 19.

just because Moltmann and others see an open human future, does it mean that they have truly rejected ontocratic models?

"What is meant by a 'qualitatively new' future which relies on eschatological images for its existence if not a new ontology springing from utopian considerations? That is, so long as the mental models of either the future or the past are not rooted in present historical movements, can we say that the hope theologians program is really revolutionary? Or is it not simply another ontocratic model that happens to be justified by the eschatological tradition of the Bible?"<sup>24</sup>

If a critical theology persists in constructing its norm from transcendental, nonempirical eschatology rather than concrete, socio-political and historical analysis, says Petulla, it runs the risk of becoming unreal and mystical. Consoling perhaps, but unable to build a lasting and sustained political movement and purpose in people's lives.

Dale Vree, writing from a position highly critical of Christian radicalism, also points out the ultimate incompatibility of Christianity and Marxism.<sup>25</sup> Specifically criticizing Gustavo Gutierrez' *Theology of Liberation*, Vree maintains that all modern Christian radicals err when they believe that human perfectibility through political action can square with the fundamental teachings of Christianity. That is, it is not possible to construct a Christian theology

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>25</sup>Dale Vree, "Political Transubstantiation: Or How to Turn Marxists into Christians by Turning Christians into Marxists," Freedom at Issue, (May-June, 1976), no. 36, pp. 22-24.

that advocates the unity of salvation along with radical political action striving for an earthly kingdom.

To equate salvation with radical political liberation, as Gutierrez' does in his theology of liberation, is to raise the idea that human willful behavior, politically motivated, can bring about salvation. This is to fall into a classical Pelagian heresy, which claims that human actions (good works) and not the gift of God's grace, are the basis of salvation itself.<sup>26</sup> But to avoid the Pelagian heresy, one would have to give up some of man's autonomous power and full conscious responsibility for his own fate. To do this, one would be giving up, to God, some of the essential powers of man claimed by Marxists and other radicals who base their views on an essentially materialist conception of history and human action.

If one argues that the Kingdom is political liberation itself, which is to deny the salvific significance of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, which is to deny Christianity itself. Or, one can maintain that man's future is not completely open, but is partly founded on God's gift of salvation, which is to deny historical materialism. You can not have it both ways.<sup>27</sup> To maintain God's autonomy and omnipotence in the historical process, one must, to some extent, deny man's autonomy and free creativity. To elevate man to the

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-24.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

position assumed by Marxists and the Christian theologians who advocate a completely open future, one must necessarily restrict the power of God.<sup>28</sup>

Along the same lines, Jacques Ellul sees some of the basis ideas of Christian radicalism moving in a direction one could catalogue under the Peoagian heresy.<sup>29</sup> Ellul perceives a dominant motif in the writings and actions of modern Christian rebels. That motif is the notion that man is now the master of his world, that he has desacralized human existence to the point where he is no longer resigned to "fate" or "the gods." Man alone, can now create a better earthly situation for himself, striving to make real what were once only utopian dreams.

This stance, Ellul argues, has unforeseen theological consequences, such as the strengthening of the death-of-God argument. Since it is believed that man guides history, it is a short step to the position where the idea of a transcendent God is fully rejected. Man now stands alone.

To summarize, a fundamental incompatibility exists between the basic assumptions of Christianity and Marxism, or any other philosophy which emphasizes man's complete autonomy in the historical process. To believe in a supreme being

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>29</sup>Jacques Ellul. Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective. ibid., pp. 74-79. Also, Jacques Ellul. Autopsy of Revolution, ibid., pp. 217-232.



who presented himself (Christ) as a gift necessary for the salvation of men, is to reduce, to some significant extent, man's ability to shape history freely in the direction of an earthly utopia. For that utopia could never be complete, given an acceptance of the basic assumptions of Christianity, without human acceptance of God's will (the precondition of salvation). To accept God's will would be a fundamental restriction on the freedom of man envisioned by Marx in the post-historical (communist) stage of human existence. It is for this reason, that Christianity and Marxism will never live together without tension and the ever-present potential for civil strife.

But suppose Christian and secular radicals working together changed the political and social arrangements of several (or many) First and Third World nations in the late twentieth, or twenty-first centuries? Could the two elements of the post-revolutionary political order live together in a pluralist framework, in which the societal consensus exhibited a healthy give and take between differing points of view, and in which each would respect the right of the other to promulgate its conception of history? Or would the tensions between Christianity and Marxism produce cultural and philosophic conflict which might lead secular radicals to reinstitutionalize the traditional hostility between socialist governing orders and organized religion? In trying to realistically assess this future

post-revolutionary situation, two trends are discernible (if the pluralist condition of permanent peaceful tension and debate does not materialize).

The first situation would be one of growing tension between secular socialism and Christian socialism, in which the heightened conflict led to either the suppression of the religious faction or the open clash between the two factions. The reason for this outlook lies in the tendency of many socialists, following the ideas expressed by Marx concerning the end of political conflict in a golden age of socialism (actually the second stage, communism), to consider social debate and conflict as having ended once the institutional aspect of a socialist society have been established and become the normal, everyday, accepted form of society. With all due respect to Marxist theory, this attitude approaches the limit of credulity.

Let us assume that a society approaching full equality governed by institutions accountable to the masses would probably reduce or eliminate many of the causes of crime, instability, and conflict present in contemporary societies. But to envision a complete end to societal conflict is simply unrealistic. Problems between the sexes, debates over the allocation of human and natural resources, controversies over the quantity, quality, and nature of social production would not just disappear, least of all in a polity where accountability and participation in decision-making

had triumphed over a Leninist conception of decision-making. A relatively open society would indeed be rife for intense debate concerning the issues just mentioned as well as new issues not yet envisioned.

In this situation, Christian radicals, not laboring under the unrealistic premises of some secular radicals that the implementation of socialism necessarily means the end of genuine and heated political debate, might take the side of the new forces challenging conventional wisdom and public policy. In other words, Christian radicals might begin to assume a stance of permanent revolution, not unlike that of the radical faction of contemporary China. If this were to come about, it is not unrealistic to imagine the tensions we have outlined above, developing into permanent, hostile divisions, setting up the potential for open political warfare, or else the suppression of the forces of resistance (Christian radicals and their new "agents of revolution").

The second avenue of political development, and probably the more likely one, would be for the Christian element of the post-revolutionary order to become the legitimizer of a new status quo. If certain cynics are correct, that "priests have been notorious for sprinkling holy water on whatever political organization seemed to be going concern at the time,"<sup>30</sup> then it would be realistic to imagine the formerly

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<sup>30</sup>Dale Vree, "Political Transubstantiation: Or How to Turn Marxists into Christians by Turning Christians into Marxists," *ibid.*, p. 24.

radical elements of Christianity to bestow its blessing on the new socio-political order, just as it has done for earlier forms of society. This would be very disturbing, and should give all who hope for a better world pause, since given the tendencies of some socialists to be content with the forms of socialism and not with the substance of human life itself, this eventually would result in the hardening of social institutions. Valid and sincere spokesmen of dissent and criticism of ongoing politics would find themselves in the same position as those socialists who had been ignored or represented in earlier stages of history. Once again, Christianity would have lent its institutional power to buttress a social order (though probably improved over earlier forms of society) seeking to avoid creative and liberating vigilance and criticism of its policies and officials.

Recent events. Certain political events of the early and mid 1970s have, in this writer's opinion, raised serious questions about the current applicability of basic Christian radical ideas. Some may go so far as to claim that these recent events cast doubt on the substantial validity of many of the major points raised in the analysis of contemporary politics that has been presented by modern religious rebels. Whatever the case may be, the world continues to change, and these changes must be noted and studied.

Christian radicals, like their secular New Left brethren,



argue basically that the so-called open and accountable political systems of the developed capitalist nations, are in fact manipulated and controlled by a power elite (or ruling class) which consistently achieves its aims in the public policy process. For this reason, a strategy of political change based on incremental reform, employing the institutions and processes already existing in these societies, will not eventually bring justice to the masses. By working within "the system," one not only lends legitimacy to the unequal structure of power, but also fails to remedy any of those conditions so desperately in need of change: poverty, racism, sexism, and militarism in the First World, and the continued domination and exploitation of the Third World.

As we have seen, there is a tendency on the part of many (though certainly not all) Christian radicals to discount the established political process of Western nations while at the same time ignoring the traditional Marxian base of revolution, the working class of these developed societies. Instead, many modern radicals look to some women, the young, the exploited racial minorities of the developed nations, and the masses of Third World nations, as the agents of revolution in the contemporary period. In their view, the working classes of developed societies have become conservatized, and are implicated in the destructive system of power known as Corporate Liberalism.

The consequence of this analysis is clear. If one

ignores the established political process while at the same time ignoring the broad social base (a majority of the population) traditionally seen as the force for liberation (organized into political parties and labor unions--potentially powerful institutions for change), one is increasingly led to a politics of insurgency which can easily lead to violence and counter-violence (or force, as some would describe the violence of the state). The outcome of the insurgency, if successful, is rather confusing. A minority movement overthrowing the system in the name of a vast majority, a strange state of affairs considering the call for participatory democracy on the part of Christian and secular New Left spokesmen. A given the view of human nature contained in the ideal of social order possessed by many radical Christians, this political stance is stranger yet.

If humans genuinely possess the traits, powers, and needs ascribed to them by the general radical perspective, then it seems bizarre to ignore a substantial portion of the population exploited by these social systems. To write off large elements of Western working classes because they labor under "hopelessly false consciousness" seems to move in a Leninist direction. Though it is true that some individuals grasp social relationships easier and earlier than others, this fact does not seem to justify a permanent minority revolutionary base. It does seem to indicate that what is needed is for a large-scale educational program to be initiated,

while infiltrating the existing institutions (political parties, unions) of the working class. An alternative course of action would be the establishment of counter-institutions within the working class which would gradually supercede, the "corrupted" ones. And if, in this situation, the system overtly repressed the alternative institutions, then a call for open resistance would stand on much firmer ground. At any rate, if the optimistic view of human nature at the heart of the radical ideal is more or less correct, then the exploited will come around (perhaps not quickly enough for some) to an awareness of their plight and act on it. And the political movement established will be a broadly based one, not a small minority who possess the "truth" and who have given up on those who, up to now, have not grasped the correct perception.

Recent events in Western Europe seem to support this criticism of New Left views. In France and Italy especially, a broad base of leftist political power, known as Eurocommunism, has challenged the status quo while working within the libertarian processes of these nations. These communist movements have, up to now, respected the notions of constitutionalism and the integrity of the competitive electoral process of these systems, and have greatly strengthened themselves while doing so. It is not hard to imagine these groups acquiring governmental power in the near future. The experience of Eurocommunism (and the increasing radicalization

of elements of the British working class) seems to indicate that a broadly based radical movement which will not "sell out" to the system, can arise and be successful in the political arena of Western capitalist society. And if this has occurred in Europe, then it might also take place in the United States, where up to now, highly critical perspectives have been the possession of a small minority.

Recent events in the Third World have also raised serious questions as to the current applicability of radical Christian ideas. The Communist victory of Viet Nam, coupled with the Arab oil boycott and the increasing tendency of Third World nations to act together in international forums for the purpose of extracting benefits from First World nations, has led some to speak of the decline of American power, or more broadly, the decline of the capitalist West. If these events portend for the future, then the process advocated by radical Christians has already begun, though hardly in the manner they described. For it has not occurred as the result of socialism sweeping across the Third World, but more as the result of nationalist tendencies, hardly the situation desired by radicals. These nationalistic drives are hardly the basis of a peaceful cooperative world order.

Evidence that nationalism, rather than a cooperative anti-Western capitalist stance, motivates the nations of the less developed areas of the world can be found in what some have called the creation of a Fourth World. These spokesmen



maintain that it is no longer correct to speak of a united Third World at all, since some nations, for example Brazil and the oil-rich Arab states, have achieved levels of modernization and development qualitatively higher than some desperately poor nations (many of which are in Africa). These richer nations, though to some extent hostile to the West (notice the oil boycott), have essentially identified themselves with the interests of the fully developed nations, thus exhibiting the characteristic self-interest of nationalism rather than Third World solidarity. Though notions of Third World solidarity continue to be spoken of in high regard by these wealthier nations, they have not, as yet, carried out any international policies which would significantly alleviate the hardships of the poorer nations. There has been, for example, no substantial distribution on the part of the Arab nations of the massive revenues garnered from the international oil trade to the poorer nations for the purpose of internal development. Nor has there been established a policy of payment for oil which would take into consideration the lack of national wealth which characterizes the poorest nations of the world. Furthermore, investment policies of the Arab nations indicate that they link their interests more with the United States, Japan, and Western Europe, than with the other nations that once made up the Third World. In summary then, the Third World solidarity advocated by Christian and secular radicals seems to be

floundering on the old shoals of national self-interest and the sudden wealth of some non-Western nations.

## CHAPTER VII

## CONCLUSIONS

Beginning in the 1960s, some Christian clerics and lay persons have developed an analysis critical of many of the features of Western capitalist societies and those Third World societies living under the hegemony of their former rulers. This political perspective bears a close resemblance to those positions advanced by modern Marxists. It is not surprising, then, that many of these Christian radicals have cooperated with secular radicals, at the level of intellectual discussion, and at the level of revolutionary action, sometimes violent, especially in Latin America.

Where Christian radicals differ from secular radicals, however, is in their belief that anti-capitalist revolution must be carried out to fulfill the wishes of God. These individuals believe that political activity which strives for human equality and dignity for all (a condition sorely lacking in many contemporary societies) is, in fact, a method of realizing the condition of man desired by God. God's teachings, which speak of the end of exploitation and domination of the many by the few, are said to be the guidelines for the true Christianity. Furthermore, the nature of the early persecuted Church, prior to its becoming a pillar of, and apologist for, inegalitarian societies, is the model for the future Christianity. This being the case, Christian radicals are called to resist,

violently if necessary, the inegalitarian social orders of the present age, joining with secular radicals in fashioning a better order here on earth.

This would not be so much of a problem were it not for the intellectual and moral tradition of Christianity, which has placed great barriers in the way of resistance to secular authority, as well as the use of violence in human affairs. The religion's heritage, in addition to its pro-authority views, has also propagated a privatistic, spiritual orientation for its members, diverting them from a serious probing of the fundamental relations of power in society, and the consequences of those relationships. In an atmosphere like this, it is doubtful that many people would gravitate to a position where it was believed that action in the secular realm of life could dramatically improve earthly conditions. As a result, a divergence, therefore, developed between the intellectual heritage of Christianity and the cultural motif of the modern age of revolution, which has subscribed to the notion of revolutionary praxis as the springboard of temporal justice and human historical betterment. Radical Christians have found themselves caught between these two bodies of ideas.

In an attempt to justify morally their stance of rebellion against modern institutions, Christian radicals have looked to their religion's past, and believe they have found several ideas which can serve as the intellectual foundation of a Christian right of resistance, even violent resistance.



They have attempted to blend the spirit and intent of the just war theory, created by St. Augustine and slightly modified by St. Thomas Aquinas (the traditional Christian exception to the condemnation of violence), with the theme of class conflict expressed in the modern social theory of the post-Enlightenment period. Since the purpose of the just war was for Christians to sincerely attempt to create a peaceful and better order between societies after the peace had been disturbed by the wrongful actions of others, modern Christian radicals believe that by turning the focus of injustice and human disturbance toward domestic affairs toward the class of dynamics within a society, they can fashion a theory of the "just revolution." Not only would this theory of justifiable resistance serve as the moral foundation of rebellious action, it would also serve as an imperfect guide to those contemplating violent revolution.

In addition, Christian radicals could borrow a page from the political philosophy of St. Augustine, by stressing the utilitarian nature of all social institutions (government, patterns of social inequality, etc.). If social and political order exists solely to provide stability to human affairs, so that higher-level goods can be realized, then the present arrangements are not doing their job. Due to their exploitive nature, they are generating bitterness and the stirrings of revolutionary thought and action among the lower strata of

society. Therefore, it becomes imperative to replace these institutions with alternative arrangements which will mitigate this state of affairs of constant strife, and provide the necessary tranquility to social life.

Christian radicals, then, have made some headway in synthesizing major elements of traditional Christian political philosophy with the revolutionary doctrines of modern times. They may very well have begun the process in which the Christian tradition is actively reintegrated into the mainstream of modern, Western political thought. However, other problems exist for the contemporary Christian radicals, problems created by the opening of possibilities for violent resistance.

The movement has, in particular, done a poor job in fashioning a calculus of political response. What degree of violence (if any at all) should be employed against a particular system of exploitation and political repression? Is violent resistance justified against a particular society that allows relative freedom in the expression of dissenting views? What if current holders of power are unaware of the consequences of their rule, perhaps even sincerely believing that their policies will incrementally alleviate conditions of poverty (in the best traditions of Western democratic liberalism)? Up until now, Christian radicals have not made serious attempts to study these variable conditions in capitalistic societies, so that their members would be better able

to judge the peculiar conditions of politics on a case-by-case basis.

Furthermore, the movement has failed to grasp fully the impact on resistance activities created by modern technology. Faced with a security bureaucracy employing modern techniques of counter-insurgency, advocates of violent resistance could well set off a process of violent response and counter-response, involving larger and larger numbers of people in the actions of internal war. This could easily lead to the mindless, insensitive terrorism witnessed more and more in the modern age.

Other problems faced the Christian radical movement as well as those mentioned above. There seems to be a deep-seated tension existing between the ideals of participatory democracy and the requirements of a socialist economy. In order to maximize efficiency and the proper utilization of social resources, as well as avoid the inherent problems and conflicts involved in decentralized, popularly controlled, productive activity, a move towards bureaucratic control of the economic process might be in order. This could lead to the elitist form of socialist organization described by Djilos, Michels, and other critics of the idea that the rejection of capitalism necessarily leads to equality of condition in the practical operation of society.

A more philosophic problem with radical Christians must deal with, is that of the compatibility between a belief

in a supreme being, and the position which maintains that human beings are totally autonomous in the range of creative action they may take in shaping history. If one subscribes to the idea of the Marxian praxis, or any materialist historical ontology, then the notion of a supreme being who has created the world and set in motion the essential guidelines of history, must be discarded. Regardless of how some radical Christian theorists may juggle the two positions, the fundamental Marxist perspective places a premium on the freely creative power of people to shape history and establish the conditions of human existence.

Some Christians have sought to evade this problem by claiming that God-in-history has led man to the point where he can now shape history without any further intervention on the part of the supreme being. But this too is a gift from God. Furthermore, the powers ascribed to the Christian God are on such a scale that they must be viewed as inalienable--they may be shared by God, but never given up completely. Back we come to the giving of gifts. But freely creative humans cannot receive gifts. They alone create the conditions of their own life. Thus, the faith in a redemptive God just does not square with this "man-is-alone" thesis. If you discard the idea of a redemptive God (in Christ), you have discarded Christianity itself. Therefore, a Christian may continue to advocate equality and humanistic changes in society, but a barrier has been erected between the religion's



basic tenets and a materialist conception of history and human action.

Finally, recent events in the capitalist West and in the Third World have led this author to question some of the basic assumptions of the radical Christian explanation of politics and society in these areas. Eurocommunism and other phenomena have raised the possibility that capitalist society can be changed through the institutions of liberalism, without resorting to extra-institutional action. In other words, the liberal-capitalist society may negate itself without assistance from outside its own institutional arrangements. Marx himself believed this to be possible in some instances. Also, recent events have shaken the belief that a united Third World can ever assault the privileged position of the developed West. A more likely outcome is the division of the Third World into newly-rich and desperately-poor camps, with a resulting instability which some day may threaten world peace and human existence itself, given the proliferation of nuclear technology.

In conclusion, we must advise radical Christians to rethink many of their basic assumptions. If they retain their ideal of social order, and thus remain radical critics of the present, then they must sharpen their analytic tools, revitalizing their analysis in the light of changing political and social conditions. They must also explore the problems of violence in the light of their religious convictions.

Finally, they must closely examine the area of ontology, to see whether or not one can remain a Christian while advocating a completely open future of temporal hope. Some, of course, will maintain that it is not possible to be a Christian and a political radical (as most of us understand that term). But only Christian men and women will ultimately provide the answer to that problem, and then only in the course of concrete history.

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